



Office of Correction Ombuds Semi Annual Report

Reporting Period: May 19, 2025 through November 30, 2025

Corrections Ombuds DeVaughn L. Ward, Esq.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Letter from the Ombuds – Page 1

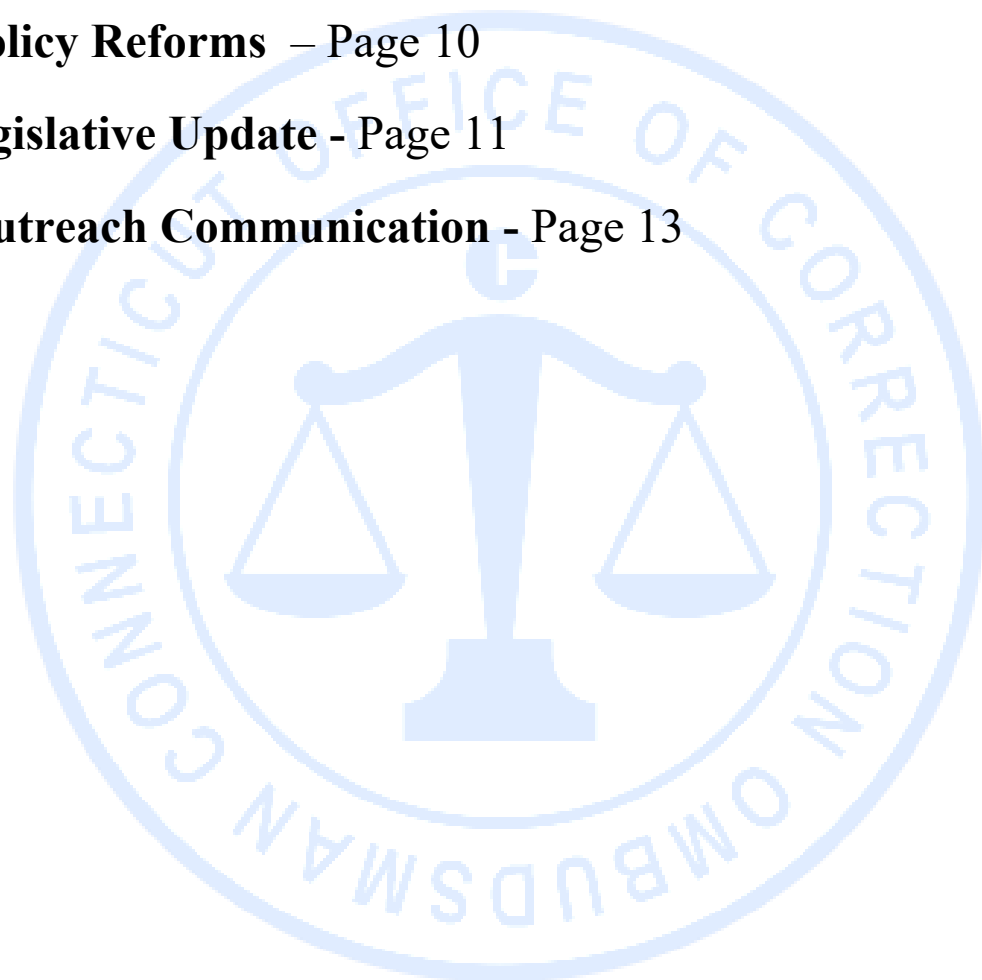
II. Organization Development – Page 3

III. Investigations – Page 7

IV. Policy Reforms – Page 10

V. Legislative Update - Page 11

VI. Outreach Communication - Page 13



November 30, 2025

Correction Advisory Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 2500
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Members of the Correction Advisory Committee,

Please find enclosed a Semi Annual Report of activities of the Office of Correction Ombuds ("OCO") for the period of May 19, 2025 through November 30, 2025.

This period reflects substantial growth and maturation of the office since its reestablishment. The passage of Public Act 25-161, signed into law on June 30, 2025, expanded the OCO's authority in transformative and unprecedented ways. For the first time, the Ombuds now holds subpoena power, the ability to conduct surveys, the express statutory right to perform both announced and unannounced inspections—including during facility emergencies or lockdowns—and a mandate that the Department of Correction (DOC) must provide written responses to all recommendations issued by the OCO. These reforms align Connecticut more closely with national corrections oversight standards and create the necessary framework for meaningful accountability within the state's correctional system.

During this reporting period, the OCO advanced several systemic investigations, issued the first subpoenas in the office's history, conducted extensive inspections across multiple facilities, monitored summer heat conditions, and engaged in a number of transparency-driven public initiatives. Internally, the office made significant strides in strengthening its operational infrastructure. This included implementing a modern case-management tracking system (CMTS), working to eliminate a substantial backlog of complaints, establishing a formal triage and prioritization model, and progressing toward the installation of secure drop-boxes to ensure incarcerated individuals can safely and confidentially access the Ombuds.

The OCO also expanded its public presence and community engagement during this period. Through media interviews, legislative testimony, classroom lectures, and participation in national ombuds networks, the office worked to enhance public understanding of independent correctional oversight and to highlight systemic issues affecting both incarcerated individuals and DOC staff.

Despite these important developments, the need for additional resources remains significant. Although recent appropriations represent an improvement over previous funding levels, they remain insufficient to meet the oversight demands of a correctional system of this size and complexity. With approximately 6,000 DOC employees, a systemwide budget exceeding \$600 million, and fourteen facilities requiring sustained and meaningful oversight, the OCO will continue advocating for the staffing and infrastructure necessary to fully execute its statutory mandate.

This report summarizes the major activities and progress of the office over the past six months and outlines the OCO's continued priorities as we move into 2026. I look forward to further

discussion with the Committee—particularly regarding the upcoming annual report on the conditions of confinement—and to our continued work together in strengthening transparency, safety, and accountability across Connecticut’s correctional system.

Respectfully submitted,
DeVaughn L Ward
DeVaughn L. Ward, Esq.
Correction Ombuds



II. Organization Development

The Office of the Ombuds and Compliance Oversight (OCO) has made significant progress in its staffing and organizational development efforts following the authorization of five new positions for the current fiscal year. This expansion is designed to strengthen the office's operational capacity and enhance service delivery.

Staffing

As of November 30, 2025, the OCO has successfully filled the Clerk Typist position, marking the first addition to the team. Offers have been extended for two key roles: the Administrative Assistant and the Assistant Ombuds Nurse Consultant positions. The Nurse Consultant has accepted the offer and is scheduled to begin duties on January 1, 2026, providing a concrete timeline for onboarding. Interviews for the Assistant Ombuds Special Investigator role are currently underway, reflecting the office's ongoing commitment to identifying qualified candidates. Meanwhile, the Associate Ombuds position is yet to be posted, with plans in place to complete all remaining hiring activities by January 2026.

Position	Status
Clerk Typist	Hired
Administrative Assistant	Offer extended and accepted; start date Jan 2, 2026
Assistant Ombuds – Nurse Consultant	Offer extended and accepted; start date Jan 9, 2026
Assistant Ombuds – Special Investigator	Offer extended
Associate Ombuds	Position posted

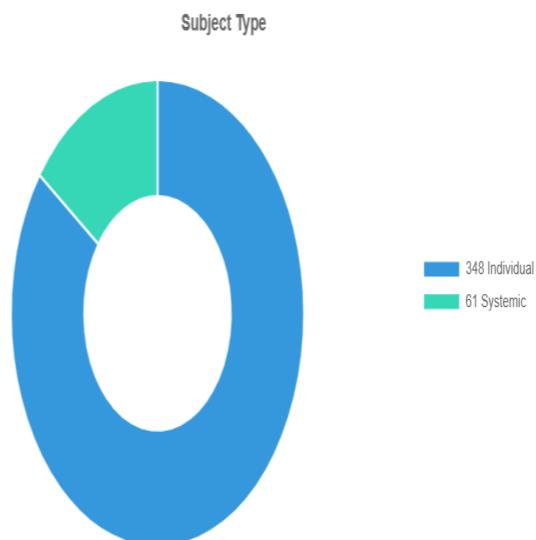
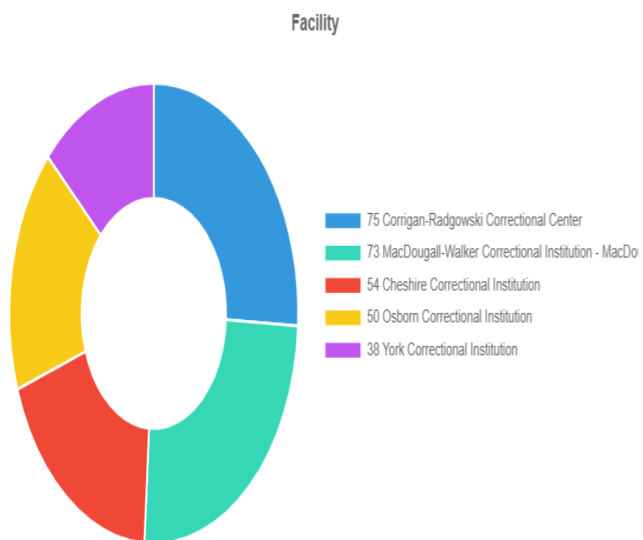
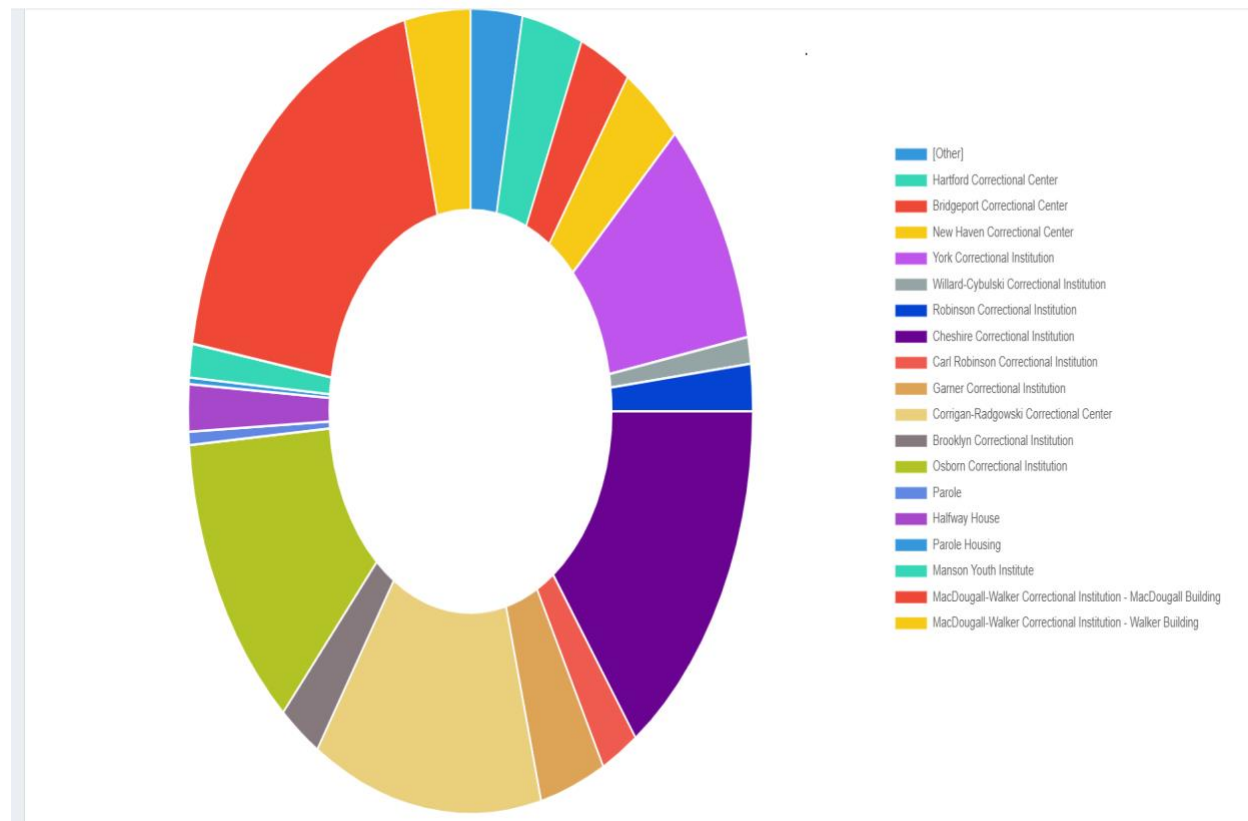
With all positions anticipated to be filled by January 2026, the OCO is on track to complete this phase of organizational development, ensuring the office is fully staffed to meet its objectives.

Case Management System Tracking System (CMTS)

With the support of the Advisory Committee, from October 12 through October 14, the Ombuds traveled to Raleigh, North Carolina to meet with the developers of the office's new case-management tracking system. The CMTS will allow the office to log, categorize, triage, and track all complaints submitted to the Ombuds, enabling the identification of trends, hotspots, and systemic issues.

The CMTS became operational on October 28. The office has now begun entering its backlog of complaints into the new system. Over 300 complaints have already been entered, and the office expects to complete the backlog by January 2026. Once fully implemented, the CMTS will significantly strengthen the OCO's ability to conduct data-driven oversight. Below are the latest

statistics showing the complaints by facility, complaints by date received, and complaints by complaint type:





Triage System and Drop-Box Infrastructure

The office has developed a detailed triage system to classify complaints based on urgency, severity, and subject matter. This system supports timely responses to emergent issues, including medical crises, safety concerns, and housing matters.

The OCO is also working with DOC on the installation of secure, confidential drop-boxes in every housing unit statewide. These boxes will ensure that incarcerated individuals can directly submit complaints to the Ombuds without interference. Drop-boxes and signage are expected to be installed by January 2026.

Law Student Interns and Spring 2026 Field Placement

The OCO hosted two law student interns from New England Law School during the summer of 2025. Their work included research on the Inmate Legal Assistance Program (ILAP), review of contractual obligations and performance metrics, comparison of national correctional legal-aid models, and support for early investigative preparation.

During this reporting period, the OCO also finalized a new field placement program that will begin in Spring 2026. Through a partnership with the University of Connecticut School of Law, the office will host two to four law students enrolled in a seminar taught by the Ombuds. This program will substantially expand the OCO's research and investigative capacity, provide skilled support for complex and document-intensive matters, and help develop the next generation of prison oversight professionals.

III. Investigations

A. Systemic Investigations

Throughout this reporting period, the Ombuds conducted extensive facility visits, engaged directly with incarcerated individuals and DOC leadership, advanced several major investigations, and expanded the office's internal capacity. The office visited facilities across the state, including Osborn, Hartford, Bridgeport, Cheshire, York, Corrigan-Radgowski, and MacDougall-Walker. These visits allowed the Ombuds to document concerns related to medical access, mail and property delays, staff-resident interactions, conditions of confinement, and facility operations.

The Ombuds met with incarcerated individuals engaged in hunger strikes at Cheshire Correctional Institution. Their concerns centered primarily on the number of lockdowns occurring across DOC facilities, the breadth of their impact, and their effects on access to services, recreation, and well-being. Following these visits, the OCO requested DOC provide detailed data related to all lockdowns during the month of July, and that information is currently under review.

The office continued to monitor individual complaints, respond to family inquiries, and work with DOC leadership when appropriate to informally resolve issues. This work provided essential insight into the daily operations of the facilities and helped identify areas requiring deeper examination.

i. Heat and Climate-Control Monitoring

Pursuant to the OCO's authority under Conn. Gen. Stat. § 18-81qq, the office conducted a heat-mitigation review during the summer of 2025 following several complaints from incarcerated individuals. Connecticut experienced multiple extended periods of extreme heat in June and July, including three multi-day heat waves and four statewide activations of the Extreme Hot Weather Protocol. Public-health guidance recognizes a heat index above 85°F as increasing the risk of heat-related illness; within correctional settings, these risks are heightened by aging infrastructure, limited ventilation, and restricted access to cooled spaces.

The OCO focused its review on the state's three correctional facilities without air conditioning—Bridgeport Correctional Center, Osborn Correctional Institution, and Hartford Correctional Center—which together house roughly 2,700 people. Complaints described inconsistent access to cold water and ice, fans being turned off during peak heat, heat-related rashes and symptoms, and medically vulnerable individuals housed in non-cooled areas.

In response, the OCO conducted two inspections at each facility, spoke with residents, and communicated with staff regarding mitigation efforts. Conditions and responses varied significantly across units and facilities, underscoring the absence of a consistent, statewide approach to heat mitigation. DOC's formal written response to the OCO's inquiry was due

November 18; although DOC requested a seven-day extension, no response has been received as of the date of this report. A public Heat Mitigation Report will be issued following review of DOC's submission.

ii. Hunger-Strike/Lockdown Monitoring at Cheshire Correctional Institution

In August 2025, the Ombuds conducted in-person visits to individuals engaged in hunger strikes at Cheshire Correctional Institution. The hunger strikers expressed concerns about the frequency of facility lockdowns and the resulting impact on programming, recreation, medical access, and overall quality of life. These concerns were consistent with broader themes emerging across the system.

The Ombuds requested DOC provide detailed data regarding lockdowns in July 2025, including the reasons for lockdowns, duration, affected housing units, and any associated staffing shortages. The office is currently reviewing this information and will incorporate its findings into future recommendations.

iii. Inmate Legal Assistance Program (ILAP) Investigation

In response to multiple complaints and concerning performance data provided by the Department of Correction, the OCO opened a systemic investigation into the Inmate Legal Assistance Program (ILAP). ILAP's own data for FY 2022–24 showed that the program received 826 new complaints over two years yet initiated only six litigation matters—fewer than one percent of all cases. Given that the program operates under an annual contract of approximately \$800,000, this disparity raised significant concerns about whether incarcerated individuals are receiving meaningful access to the courts, as required by constitutional standards.

On July 31, 2025, the OCO issued its first subpoenas to Bansley Law LLC, the private law firm contracted to operate ILAP, directing the production of records by August 25. Bansley objected and did not comply. On October 9, the OCO formally requested that DOC suspend Bansley's contract until the firm complied with the subpoenas. On October 31, after no production was made, the OCO filed a petition in Hartford Superior Court seeking enforcement of the subpoenas. DOC responded on November 17 but did not address the contract suspension or the substantive questions raised in the OCO's letter. The investigation remains ongoing.

iv. Investigation into DOC Legal Costs and Settlement Expenditures

The Ombuds Office continued its investigation into the Department of Correction's legal costs associated with settlements and litigation expenses, prompted by concerns about transparency and the fiscal impact of repeated claims of misconduct. As part of this inquiry, the Ombuds sought detailed records from both the Department of Correction and the Office of the Attorney General, including invoices, settlement agreements, and expense summaries. The Attorney General's Office initially objected to producing several categories of documents, asserting statutory exemptions and claiming certain settlement information had already been disclosed through prior spreadsheets. However, subsequent subpoenas and public reporting revealed that additional settlements and legal expenditures existed that were not included in the original production. These discrepancies led to a contested Freedom of Information proceeding, during which the Ombuds submitted supplemental exhibits demonstrating gaps in the agencies' disclosures. The FOI matter remains ongoing, with further hearings scheduled to resolve the scope of required production and to determine whether DOC and the Attorney General must fully release the remaining financial and settlement records.

B. Individual Investigations

i. J'Allen Jones

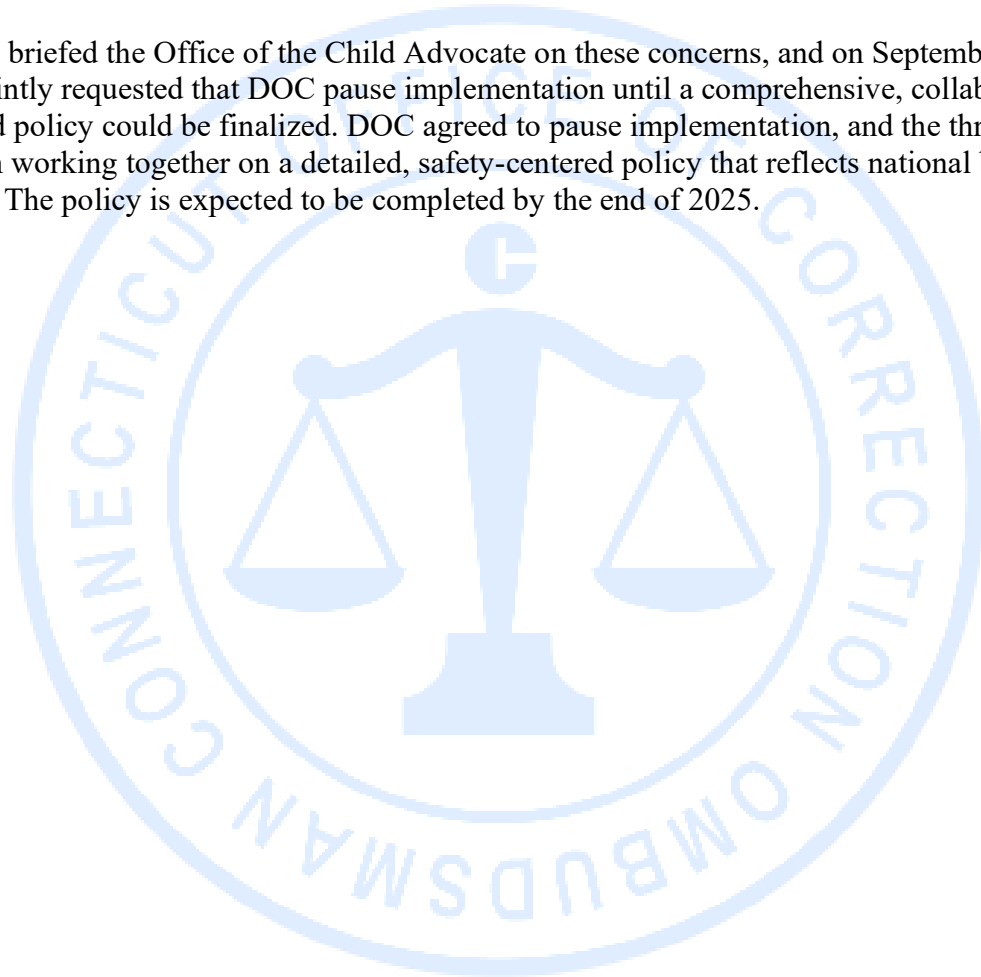
The OCO continues its independent investigation into the 2018 death of J'Allen Jones, which the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner ruled a homicide at Garner Correctional Institution. As part of this inquiry, the Ombuds is reviewing DOC incident reports, use-of-force documentation, medical and mental-health records, internal communications, and all available interviews previously conducted by DOC and other agencies. The Office is also examining the disciplinary histories and personnel files of staff involved in the incident and its aftermath. In November 2025, the Ombuds completed a full review of the unedited video depicting both the events leading to Mr. Jones's death and the death itself. This comprehensive investigatory review—integrating documentary evidence, recorded interviews, disciplinary records, and full video analysis—remains ongoing as the OCO evaluates whether DOC policies, practices, or staff conduct contributed to the circumstances surrounding Mr. Jones's death.

IV. Policy Reforms

Body Scanner Policy Review

On September 23, the Ombuds observed training on Tek84 body scanners being introduced at York Correctional Institution and Manson Youth Institution. Following the training, the OCO identified several concerns—particularly relating to youth populations, privacy, data retention, radiation exposure guidelines, and protocols for searches of transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals.

The OCO briefed the Office of the Child Advocate on these concerns, and on September 30 both offices jointly requested that DOC pause implementation until a comprehensive, collaboratively developed policy could be finalized. DOC agreed to pause implementation, and the three offices have been working together on a detailed, safety-centered policy that reflects national best practices. The policy is expected to be completed by the end of 2025.



V. Legislative Update

During the 2025 legislative session, the Office of the Correction Ombuds (OCO) testified on over a dozen bills impacting the rights and conditions of confinement for incarcerated individuals. These proposals addressed critical issues including solitary confinement, access to medical and mental health care, disciplinary procedures, transparency in facility operations, and communication with family and legal support systems. One key advocacy success was the reversal of a proposal to eliminate free electronic messaging for incarcerated people from the General Assembly's budget. That reversal—secured through sustained testimony by the OCO and advocacy partners—signals a meaningful legislative commitment to preserving human connection and legal access for those in custody.

Public Act 25-161 – Strengthening Oversight Powers

The most significant legislative development of the period was the enactment of Public Act 25-161, signed into law on June 30, 2025. This transformative legislation enhances the authority and independence of the Correction Ombuds by:

- Granting subpoena power;
- Permitting unannounced inspections even during lockdowns and facility emergencies;
- Authorizing the use of surveys to gather information directly from incarcerated individuals;
- Requiring DOC to respond in writing to all recommendations issued by the OCO;
- Expanding the statutory definition of “use of force” to include mechanical restraints, chemical agents, canines, chokeholds, less-lethal munitions, and forcible extractions—ensuring consistent reporting;
- Extending the Ombuds' term from two to four years to align with gubernatorial cycles;
- Mandating that the Department of Correction develop and submit a body camera feasibility plan by January 1, 2027.

Collectively, these reforms bring Connecticut's correctional oversight model into alignment with national best practices and directly strengthen the OCO's investigative reach, independence, and transparency.

Public Act 25-168 – Budget Appropriations and Policy Implementation

Public Act 25-168, signed in July 2025, appropriates \$796,000 for FY 2025–26 and \$780,000 for FY 2026–27 to fund the foundational staffing and operations of the OCO. These are the first comprehensive appropriations made since the office's statutory reestablishment. Funding will support at least five new positions, including an Associate Ombuds, Special Investigator, Nurse Consultant, Administrative Assistant, and Clerk Typist.

While this investment represents significant progress from the originally proposed \$400,000, it falls short of the resources needed to fully support the OCO's mandate. Continued legislative

advocacy will be necessary to expand capacity and ensure the office can meet its statutory obligations.

Public Act 25-168 also codified elements of Senate Bill 1543, including:

- A ban on nutritionally punitive meals, including “nutraloaf”;
- A mandate for DOC to study potential relocation of Bridgeport and New Haven correctional centers;
- New requirements for internal documentation and review of staff assaults;
- Budgetary language supporting the procurement of full-body scanners, though not formalized as a “pilot program”;
- Direction to improve recruitment and retention efforts within DOC staffing ranks.

Healthcare Oversight and Delayed Reporting

Portions of Senate Bill 1394, which sought to strengthen correctional healthcare oversight, were incorporated into Public Act 25-168. The Act requires the Office of the Correction Ombuds to produce a comprehensive correctional healthcare oversight report evaluating access to care, timeliness, staffing adequacy, and health outcomes. Although the original deadline for this report was December 1, 2025, hiring delays have necessitated an extension. As a result, the healthcare oversight report will be incorporated into the December 1, 2026 Annual Conditions of Confinement Report.

VI. Outreach Communications

During the reporting period of May 2025 through November 2025, the Ombuds significantly expanded public-engagement and media-communications efforts to strengthen transparency and increase public understanding of issues within Connecticut's correctional system.

Public Engagements and Media Appearances

The Ombuds delivered a guest lecture to an Investigative Journalism class at the University of New Haven, providing students with an in-depth discussion of carceral oversight, conditions-of-confinement investigations, and the role of independent watchdog agencies.

The Ombuds also participated in a recorded interview with the CT Examiner, now available on Spotify and other podcast platforms, discussing the mission of the Office, oversight challenges, and developing trends in Connecticut's correctional system.

Throughout this period, the Ombuds appeared in multiple broadcast media segments. These included an interview on WTIC addressing the ongoing investigation into the death of J'Allen Jones, and an appearance on WTNH, where the Ombuds discussed both the Jones case and broader statewide issues relating to reentry services, recidivism, and family reunification.

In addition to direct media appearances, several news stories, radio segments, and online video reports throughout the summer and fall highlighted the Ombuds' work, including coverage of the Office's investigative findings, public statements, and testimony relating to conditions inside DOC facilities. These media reports played an important role in elevating public awareness of both individual cases and systemic concerns.

Public Transparency on the Jones Case

Parallel to its investigative review, the OCO carried out extensive outreach and public-transparency efforts regarding the 2018 death of J'Allen Jones. On August 19, 2025, Ombuds DeVaughn Ward published an op-ed in Hearst Media titled "*The CT Prison Video AG Tong Doesn't Want You to See*," calling for the release of the video documenting the incident and urging greater institutional transparency.

On August 22, the Ombuds testified in court in support of full disclosure of the video—testimony that marked the first moment in which the State signaled any willingness to permit restricted viewing after years of denying release. Following the court order issued on October 17 mandating full public disclosure, the Ombuds met with the Governor's Office on October 23 to discuss the anticipated release, the OCO's role in contextualizing the footage, and the forthcoming recommendations that would accompany public dissemination.

Public release of the video is anticipated in the coming days. The OCO will continue its outreach efforts to ensure transparency, promote accuracy in public understanding, and support residents, families, advocates, and policymakers in accessing reliable information as this matter progresses.

