

Good afternoon,

My name is Abigail Husselbee and I am a Law Fellow at the Greater Boston Legal Services CORI & Re-entry Project here today on behalf of our clients. The CORI & Re-entry Project provides legal assistance every year to 500 to 800 people who are excluded from housing and employment due to the stigma of having a criminal record. Many of our clients have been incarcerated, have family members in jail, and come from communities disproportionately impacted by incarceration.

As you consider the 2022 fiscal year budget, I ask you to look critically at the funding provided to corrections. Corrections funding should be commensurate with the number of people incarcerated, but expenses keep rising even as jail populations decline. Instead of incarceration, which has no significant impact on crime, we should be looking to alternatives such as substance use treatment, jobs, and housing, all of which are shown to reduce recidivism.

Beyond my work at GBLS, I have personally experienced the lack of transparency in sheriffs' claims of underfunding. I am a resident of Winchester and have worked in recent months to advocate for no cost calls with over 1300 other Middlesex residents. To evaluate the sheriffs' public claims that the No Cost Calls Bill is untenable due to funding constraints and that the bill could only come at the expense of other programming, I sought financial records from the Middlesex Sheriffs' Office. Only after a public records request, two months, and a formal appeal to the Secretary of the Commonwealth did I receive responsive documents from the sheriff. Another Middlesex resident that I work with, after similar time and effort, has still not received budget reports that the Massachusetts Sheriffs Association was required by law to file with the legislature in 2020.

Based on my professional and personal experience, I ask you to hold corrections accountable for their massive budgets by enforcing the current reporting provisions, requiring greater transparency to the public, and investing in communities instead of jails and prisons. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

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