To the Commission,

Over the past decade the number of incarcerated in Massachusetts has dropped from over 20,000 to 12,500.  And yet staffing and funding has continued to climb.

In addition, as of December 27, 2021, the prison occupancy rate is 58%, and the House of Correction occupancy rate (average, statewide) is at 57%.  Yet there is a push to build new prisons, beginning with a new women's prison.  In contrast, New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, seeing similar declines in occupancy, announced in November that she will close six New York prisons on March 10, 2022.

Also, statewide, the number of people held at county houses of correction without conviction dwarfs the number held with convictions.  In Plymouth County, where I live, as of December 27, 2021, there were 635 men in the Plymouth House of Correction.  95 of these had a conviction and were on a county sentence.

When you look at these three sets of statistics :

declining populations, with rising staff and costs

low occupancy rates, with no visible efforts to close prisons

a high ratio of pretrial detainees in relation to county-sentenced

one must ask, what is going on?   And here is the elephant in the room, the thing no one discusses.  Maintaining the system, as is, amounts to a jobs program, for those employed by it.  We should be instituting a hiring freeze.  When someone leaves or retires, don't replace them.   This doesn't even impact those currently employed and should be easy to do.  And let's put a five-year moratorium on prison and jail construction.  There are growing demands for a public health approach to social problems.  We should be moving in that direction, and we cannot do that if we continue to make massive investments in the current system.

Louellyn Lambros