Recap of Oral Testimony to the Special Commission on Correctional Funding            Mary Valerio    Actual Justice Task Team UCC Churches    Jan. 4,2022

  Thank you all for allowing me to speak today. Since I will be speaking on the need for more programming and education in our corrections system I will be speaking to these needs at the DOC as they receive nearly as much funding for corrections as all of the counties combined. We need more accountability on the funding and scope of prison programs and education.In 2016 a study by Rand found that : "Those who participate in prison education are 43% less likely to return to prison".Also that for every dollar spent on prison education, you save five dollars on recidivism.

  Here in Massachusetts we spent at the DOC in 2021 over $100,000. per incarcerated person. We need more accountability on how this money is being spent especially when it comes to education and programming. The best way I feel is to track what programs or education each person inside is getting. By participating in education, programs or a prison job it is possible to earn fifteen days of good time per month due to the 2018 Criminal Justice Legislation which increased good time. We now have approx. 6000 people in our prison system of which 5000 are due to be released at some point. If starting this month each of them could participate in education and programs they could each earn six months of good time by year end. This six months off each of their sentences could save the DOC $250 million dollars a year. Instead, according to the DOC 2019 Annual Report, just 77 males who were released that year had earned a high school equivalency certificate inside. What the report does not mention is that year 2155 males were released. Clearly we need to do more with education inside.

   We may wonder if such improvements are possible but other states are succeeding . The two states with the lowest recidivism rates are Virginia and South Carolina.Virginia publishes reports on it's education efforts on its DOC website with great detail. They have said: " Education changes the culture, the mind set and the behavior of someone who may be incarcerated " In South Carolina they publish their corrections ratio on their website,while here in Massachusetts we are reluctant to let the public know. In South Carolina the corrections officer ratio is 10 incarcerated to one officer. Here it is less than two to one officer. However in South Carolina when you include all staff, such as teachers, vocational teachers, mental health, etc. the ratio drops to just over three to one. Clearly they have a mix of supportive staff and not only corrections officers. Here in Mass, according to the Controller's Payroll Account there are 100 paid corrections officers  to every one teacher on the payroll.

   The Controller's Payroll Account also shows that in 2021 the Corrections Officers Overtime was at $46 million for this past year. This is an account that increases every year even before COVID.  We now have six corrections officers who are making over $290,000 per year including overtime. Many make between $100,000 to $150,000 per year with overtime. One has made over $200,000 in overtime alone. This while the teachers on the payroll are outnumbered by corrections officers dramatically. Many families of those who are incarcerated have told me that their family members have waited  some as long as ten years to learn to read and write or to speak English or to get an education. This is unacceptable.

   I would like this Commission to mandate that the DOC produce a quarterly report on good time from the Data Computation Unit at DOC which will provide the number in prison each quarter and the percentage of those receiving no good time, some, or all fifteen days. This will be an indication of who is enrolled in programs, education and such and what percent are being left behind. The goal will be to have all of those inside who can earn good time to get the fifteen days every month. We need to have results and accountability for our tax dollars spent and the human lives we are in charge of.

  Thank you for your time on behalf of the Actual Justice TasK Team of the UCC Churches and on behalf of the tax payers of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.