January 11, 2022

Dear Co-Chairs Brownsberger and Day and other members of the Special Commission on Correctional Funding:

I urge the Commission to decrease funding to sheriffs and to the Department of Correction, to hold the sheriffs and the DOC accountable for their lack of accountability and transparency, and to recommend reallocating state funding to community-based services in Massachusetts.

As a member of the Keeping Families Connected/No Cost Calls Coalition (advocating on behalf of H.1900 and S.1559, the No Cost Calls bills), I remain concerned that the Massachusetts legislature continues to increase the sheriffs' budget each year despite the decreasing number of incarcerated people in our Commonwealth. In its 2018 fiscal year report about cost-savings measures, the Massachusetts Sheriffs Association actually recommended reducing overtime costs and early retirement of senior supervisors: [http://correctionalfunding.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/MSA-Cost-Savings-Measures-FY2018.pdf](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fcorrectionalfunding.com%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2019%2F12%2FMSA-Cost-Savings-Measures-FY2018.pdf&data=04%7C01%7Calicia.brisson%40masenate.gov%7Ce418df3d5edb480785b808d9d511c2f7%7C0b947e6bff264b13ae1c573c6750c888%7C1%7C0%7C637775094988715478%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=O1UY8n%2B5paVX7ZvTZ4ushSTREfPQS7dB6TQhDfB%2FJuI%3D&reserved=0)  To quote from this report, "Overtime costs and the ratio of personnel to supervisors could also be addressed more immediately if sheriffs had an option to encourage some of their senior supervisors to retire early and then replacing those officers with entry-level correctional officers. This would favorably affect the ratio of officers to supervisors, reduce total salaries, and provide additional officers to reduce the need for overtime." **I urge the Commission to decrease the numbers of sheriffs in facilities throughout Massachusetts.**

In addition, the Massachusetts legislature requires the Massachusetts Sheriffs Association to report annual costs, fees, revenues, and expenditures for all facilities. However, last year, our Coalition had to file and then appeal a public records request to our county sheriff to obtain a copy of statewide data. **I call on the Commission to hold the MSA accountable for its lack of transparency about sheriffs' income streams and spending.**

Further, the state of Massachusetts spends approximately $1.3 billion each year to incarcerate 13,000 people. Our Commonwealth must stop the criminalization of people of color, poor and low wealth people, trauma survivors, and other marginalized groups.  In addition, rather than spending $50 million on a new prison for women, our Commonwealth must address the root causes of harm and stop the cycle of incarceration. I support a jail and prison construction moratorium in Massachusetts, H.1905 and S.2030. **I urge the Commission to decrease our Commonwealth's funding to the Department of Correction and to hold the DOC accountable for its lack of transparency in its spending.**

Finally, I ask the Commission to recommend that the state of Massachusetts reallocate its funding to pay for community-based services, not for jails and prisons. Community-based services include housing; food; child and elder care; employment; fully funded schools from preschool through college; full spectrum health-care services; mental health treatment and addiction services, culturally-relevant services; and mental health crisis response units that do not include policing.

In summary, I urge the Commission to examine ways to decrease state spending to the sheriffs and to the DOC. This examination should prioritize reductions in staffing, the single biggest source of spending. In addition, I urge the Commission to recommend independent oversight of the sheriffs and the DOC -- to include public reporting of the sheriffs' and the DOC's spending and outcomes -- in order to maximize accountability and transparency. I also ask the Commission to take all measures to continue the downward trend of incarceration in Massachusetts -- especially during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic -- by recommending that our Commonwealth reallocate funding to community-based services.

Sincerely,

Sarah Koolsbergen

Member, Keeping Families Connected/No Cost Calls Coalition