Testimony to the Special Commission on Correctional Funding, January 10, 2022

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As a Professor of Sociology and Criminal Justice at Suffolk University, and a member of the Women and Incarceration Project located at Suffolk University’s Center for Women’s Health and Human Rights, I am deeply concerned about the lack of transparency regarding correctional funding.

My colleagues and I routinely need to submit public records requests in order to access the kinds of data that other agencies routinely make available. All too often, we are told that the information is not available because it is not collected, not organized, or not in a form that can be released to the public.

For example, national studies show that the vast majority of incarcerated women struggle with substance use and live with co-occurring substance use and mental health disorders. At the current time, neither the DOC nor the county sheriffs’ offices report data on women diagnosed with a substance use disorder at admission. They also do not report the number of women with co-occurring mental illness and substance use disorder. They do not report how much is spent on what programs for these women or who is eligible to participate. Perhaps most troubling, they do not report on the effectiveness of programs.

Despite these limitations, over the past several years my colleagues and I have managed to collect a great deal of information regarding women in the correctional system in Massachusetts. That information is synthesized, formatted and posted on our website in a form that is easily accessible to DOC staff, legislators and the general public. The information we have posted includes analyses of [women and violent crime](https://cpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/sites.suffolk.edu/dist/1/1933/files/2021/09/Women_and_Violent_Crime.pdf), https://cpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/sites.suffolk.edu/dist/1/1933/files/2021/11/Ineffectiveness-of-Prison-Based-Therapy-2021-1.pdf and [substance use among women](https://cpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/sites.suffolk.edu/dist/1/1933/files/2021/10/Women-and-Substance-Use-Fact-Sheet.pdf) in the criminal-legal system, and detailed alternatives to incarceration for women.

We urge the Special Commission to read and consider this data and analyses in order to make informed, transparent decisions. We refer you to our website: https://sites.suffolk.edu/wiproject/

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