

Press Release: *Shortsighted Actions put Public Safety at Great Risk*
Date: **May 5, 2016**
From: **Bridgeport Reentry Collaborative**

The sudden elimination of more than \$10,000,000 of community-based services for women, men, and youth returning from prison will pose a major threat to public safety and reverse the recent progress toward creating a more effective, less expensive, and more rehabilitative criminal justice system in Connecticut. The elimination of these vital programs will drive costs up. As a result of the cuts, the prison population is expected to increase by 1,000. At \$50,262 per year per inmate¹ this could drive prison costs up significantly – by as much as \$50,262,000². Taxpayers pay for this! Ninety-five percent (95%) of inmates will eventually be released to the community, with or without necessary services in place. According to recent reports³, between 55% of male inmates and 73% of female inmates in state prisons suffer from mental illness. Sixty-five percent (65%) have a diagnosable substance use disorder⁴ and only 11% receive treatment while incarcerated⁵.

This drastic elimination of mental health, trauma, and substance abuse treatment services along with the elimination of other supportive services such as GED, job training, job placement, family reunification, education, and family supports portends catastrophe.

Bridgeport will lose \$3,000,000 of these critical services. A disproportionate amount - about 30% of the total statewide! There is not enough capacity in other systems now. Add to that the nearly 800 parolees suddenly not receiving mental health, trauma, and substance abuse treatment due to the elimination of Family ReEntry's Bridgeport DOC Behavioral Health Program. The same situation is true in New Haven where the closing of the Family ReEntry's DOC Behavioral Health Program will leave 750 parolees without critical services. What would criminologists predict will happen? Crime rates increase? Victimization increases? Policing and Court⁶ costs increase? Is this an attractive climate for business?

The DOC has elected to maintain their residential halfway house and other bed capacity across the state. These programs are important and necessary. However, this begs the question – ***“What is the outcome of inmate beds in neighborhoods in communities across the Connecticut without mental health, substance abuse, job training, and educational services?”*** At what human and financial cost?

The Legislature **MUST** act to direct the Department of Correction to restore these vital programs that are essential to public safety! The short term financial benefit will be short-lived. The inevitable tragedies that will follow will be irreversible.

This message supported by:

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¹ According to the Vera Institute of Justice (2012, 2016)

² Actual costs of the incremental increases in the prison population over time as a result of the program eliminations, is difficult to estimate.

³ According to an Urban Institute Report and The Treatment Advocacy Center

⁴ CT DOC's study indicated that 90% of inmates have some degree of substance abuse dependency, abuse, or misuse.

⁵ According to a recent report by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse

⁶ At a time when the Judicial Branch will need to close Courts and layoff Court staff.