



State of Connecticut

DIVISION OF PUBLIC DEFENDER SERVICES

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Testimony of John R. DelBarba, Assistant Legal Counsel Office of Chief Public Defender

JUDICIARY COMMITTEE - MARCH 26, 2025

Raised Bill No. 1541

AN ACT CONCERNING THE OFFICE OF THE CORRECTION OMBUDS, USE OF FORCE AND BODY CAMERAS IN CORRECTION FACILITIES, CLAIMS AGAINST THE STATE BY PERSONS WHO ARE INCARCERATED

The Office of Chief Public Defender (OCPD) supports *S.B. 1541, An Act Concerning the Office of the Corrections Ombuds, Use of Force and Body Cameras in Correction Facilities, Claims Against the State by Persons who are Incarcerated*. While this Office supports all Sections of this Bill and believes that this Bill addresses needed changes and provides the necessary tools for the Office of the Corrections Ombuds, this Office is particularly concerned with maintaining appropriate funding and the new funding language in Section 2 which amends subsection (d)(1) and (2) of *C.G.S. 18-81qq, Office of the Correction Ombuds*, which provides for expenditure requirements and recommendations as well as a necessary provision concerning a mandate preventing reduction by the Governor.

As of February 2025, there were over 11,000 individuals incarcerated here in Connecticut spread out among 14 correctional facilities.¹ The Department of Correction has 18 Correctional facilities located throughout our entire state - five of which are currently closed due to a reduction in the offender population. Twelve facilities hold adult males, one for teenage males, and one for females.² Based on both the number of individuals incarcerated which

¹See Connecticut Department of Correction Research Unit Average Confined Inmate Population:
<https://portal.ct.gov//media/doc/pdf/monthlystat/stat03012025.pdf?rev=07d0486d4d6f4857acde768c1c728e5b&hash=693BFD78FC5DD3523921ECEA2BFA94E7>

² See <https://portal.ct.gov/doc/common-elements/common-elements/frequently-asked-questions-faq#:~:text=2.,and%20one%20for%20female%20offenders>.

March 26, 2025

Judiciary Committee

S.B. 1541 An Act Concerning the Office of the Corrections Ombuds, Use of Force and Body Cameras in Correction Facilities, Claims Against the State by Persons who are Incarcerated

would fall under the Office of the Corrections Ombuds as well as their locations spread out throughout our state, it is both extremely important and necessary that the Ombudsman receive the necessary funding in order to both staff this office as well as carry out its statutory mandate. As was noted over this past week, Ombudsman Ward is currently addressing close to 500 complaints from incarcerated individuals, and that he'd only been able to respond to about 100 of those.³ There are already disagreements over funding that is noted in this same article and funding needs to be addressed.

This Bill provides for a funding structure that not only will be requested and recommended by the best person on the ground - The Office of the Correction Ombuds - but will further address an ongoing argument involving an appearance of bias and/or interference by the Governor's office (including the Commissioner of DOC) and requires the prohibition of reduction of allotments by the Governor in order to address this argument. Without the necessary funding for this Office, this is tantamount to an unfunded mandate.

In conclusion, the Office of Chief Public Defender requests this Committee to vote *favorably* on this bill. Thank you.

³ See <https://ctmirror.org/2025/03/18/devaughn-ward-ct-doc-ombuds-committee-approval/>