



ONE VOICE UNITED

Blue Ribbon Commission Report

2022

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INTRODUCTION

FROM OVU FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ANDY POTTER

The OVU Blue Ribbon Commission Hearing on Correctional Officer Wellness is a prime example of One Voice United's approach and work at its best.

One Voice United's mission is to provide a platform for Correctional Officers and professional staff to have their voices heard and their concerns addressed in the ongoing debates over reforming our correctional system. Founded in 2016, OVU is dedicated to forging a path in which corrections staff and reform leaders can work together to transform our system of incarceration from a broken one that harms everyone it touches to a system that is rooted in human dignity. Our primary goals are grounded in seeking to bring a broad range of stakeholders together to create (from a system that was not designed for success for anyone) a new system that is sustainable, and more dignified, than the one that is currently doing so much damage to so many people.

This first-of-its-kind Blue Ribbon Commission (BRC) was designed to shed light on the deadly wellness crisis that is sweeping through our correctional system, yet not seen by most Americans. By calling on OVU's vast network of partners and allies, the BRC was a rare opportunity to hear first hand stories from directly impacted officers, testimony from some leading experts on correctional wellness, and remarks from several prominent leaders and advocates working across the criminal justice landscape.

It was an honor to be joined by this distinguished panel of Blue Ribbon Commissioners. Their titles, words of affirmation, networks, spheres of influence and commitment to work towards officer wellness are demonstrative of the power that comes from relationships. We are also deeply grateful to the seven panelists who joined us to share their personal experiences and perspectives. Thanks to their courage and bravery, we feel we have taken an important leap in our collective effort to bring more awareness and action to this crisis in corrections.

On behalf of the entire OVU team, I feel privileged to have been part of such a momentous gathering and hope that our efforts will ignite more stakeholders to begin to recognize and address this crisis. It is our hope that sharing this report will provide an opportunity to inspire officers and staff and add much needed momentum to our movement.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AS REFLECTED ON BY COMMISSIONER JULIENE JAMES

On May 13, 2022 I had the honor of participating in One Voice United's Blue Ribbon Commission hearing on Correctional staff Wellness. I will never forget it. Throughout the day, I heard from corrections officers, families, and experts on the harmful effects of the prison environment on those who work there. I was struck by the commonality between those who work there and those who are incarcerated there. They all experience the same environment, and it does not discriminate in its effects. The witnesses shared their pain and trauma using such vivid language, it took my breath away. Here are a few of their words:

"The enemy is the environment, not the population."

"The rain doesn't care whether you're a prisoner or a CO. You all get wet."

"It's like second hand smoke—we may not be smokers, but we all get cancer."

"We're not people with lives outside. We're a body that the system needs."

"There should be a warning label before we sign up for this job."

"Even when I'm home, I'm not home."

"We need help."

There it was. An entire workforce paying with their health and their lives, simply for an opportunity to support their families and have a career. The tragedy of the situation is bigger than that. This workforce is meant to support the rehabilitation of those who are incarcerated. Yet they are in no position to help others heal. They are enduring a mass trauma of their own. In the words of one expert witness, "we're kidding ourselves if we think correctional staff can do rehabilitation."

How did we get here? It wasn't an accident. Those who have studied the origins of mass incarceration understand that a series of policy choices designed to get "tough on crime" led to this moment. Those policy choices had no basis in research and were propelled by racist narratives equating Blackness with criminality. After years of this failed experiment, studies consistently show that American-style incarceration does not deliver public safety. As counterintuitive as it may seem, reducing prison populations can both increase public safety and decrease the harms experienced by officers, incarcerated people, and all of their families and communities.

The day ended on a hopeful note. Some participants shared their dreams for the future: self care and healing from trauma; inviting prosecutors and judges into prisons to see the conditions for themselves; education about mental health and addiction treatment to support the needs of everyone inside prisons; a more empathetic culture that allows officers to ask for help and get it; an entirely reimagined system. I was buoyed by a dream of my own: what if officers and currently and formerly incarcerated people linked arms to push for humane conditions? This joint force of impacted people just might tip the scales toward more just and dignified lives for all.

"When we leave here today, I want folks to go back and think about how we make real change. How do we take a system that's just broken, harming everyone that comes into contact with it and transform it? This awareness and call to action shouldn't just stop when everybody walks out of these doors. So, I ask that you just ponder and think about what's possible for the future."



- Andy Potter
*Founder & Executive Director of
One Voice United opening the 2022 BRC*

TRANSCRIBED PROGRAM

The following is a transcription from OVU's Blue Ribbon Commission. It has been lightly edited for clarity.

Moderator Simon Greer:

Good morning, everybody. I have the honor of moderating this first ever Blue Ribbon Commission. And I'm looking for anyone who wants to claim there has been a Blue Ribbon Commission on Correctional Wellness before, because I don't think so. Some people might be asking why we're here. And I'm not going to belabor the point with all the statistics out in the world, but I will start with a select few that set the context for this hearing.

Research has revealed the following... that on average, among corrections officers, three a week take their own lives. We also know that corrections officers suffer with a 34% PTSD rate, which is higher than any other profession in the United States. And the statistic that stays with me most, so if you leave with no other numerical take away from today please hear this, corrections officers have a life expectancy of about 59 years as compared to about 75 years for the average American, which means you sacrifice about 15 years of life expectancy just because you go to work in corrections.

Now, corrections officers will tell you, many of whom are here today, 'we know what we signed up for, it's tough job, we get that'. But no one said you have to give up 15 years of your life for making this your career.

And so, in short, that's why we're doing this commission - because it's a crisis.

We could have had this meeting among 20 of us, 50 of us, a hundred of us who all agree about everything. We could talk to ourselves. Which is kind of what we do these days - right? We find the people who agree with me, get together, talk trash about the other people, and be happy that we're right.

But our idea was, let's not do that. Let's do something different.

Let's bring together a cast of characters who do not agree on everything, who may disagree fundamentally about some things.

And so, everyone in the audience and all the testifiers and all of the commissioners here today don't all agree. But wouldn't that be novel - that we could get together and say, we disagree about a lot of things, but the 15 years of life that corrections officers are giving up, that we can agree shouldn't go on and we can agree to do something about it.

And maybe if this diverse a crowd of people with this many different perspectives could agree that it's a crisis that can't go unaddressed, maybe we can actually do something about it. That's why we're having the commission.

Now, it's easy to say, well, we want people from a lot of different backgrounds, but it's also harder to do because we all have different language, we have different life experiences, we have different perspectives.

So I just want to ask everyone to take a deep breath and prepare to offer each other some grace.

Someone is likely going to use a word that you dislike and you might react - "they called us guards, can you believe it, again with us being called guards?". And yes, fair enough to feel triggered but later you can grab them and explain why you actually prefer to be called a corrections officer and talk about that with them. And someone else might say inmate and triggering others to jump in objecting that we no longer use that word but prefer to say incarcerated individual.

Our job here is not to pretend that those differences don't exist and not to say that they don't matter. Over time and in the context of relationships, we believe that you can talk to someone and say, this is why the language matters to me, this is why certain words have meaning. But the assumption isn't that we're all on the same page with the same language, the same training, the same background, the same life experience. We have differences. But that's what we believe makes change possible, because we can cross our differences to solve our pressing problem. So hopefully you'll all extend a little grace to each other.

And with that, I think we'll get started.

I'm going to give the commissioners an opportunity to introduce themselves, quickly saying their name and affiliation.

Commissioner Introductions:

- Ken Daly, CEO Guardian RFID
- David Pitts, Urban Institute senior research fellow
- Daniel Kennedy, President of the student body at Oberlin College.
- Brianna Nuhfer, Vice President for criminal justice reform at Stand Together
- Reverend Terrence Melvin, the president of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists and executive director for the AFL-CIO Racial Justice Task Force.
- Amanda Ripley. I'm a journalist who writes about conflict.
- Dr. Nneka Jones Tapia, managing director of Justice Initiatives at Chicago Beyond
- Mary Kay Henry, president of the Service Employees International Union.
- Rob English, senior organizer with the Industrial Areas Foundation.
- Julie James, vice president of criminal justice at Arnold Ventures.
- David Safavian. I'm the general counsel for the American Conservative Union, and I'm the director of the Nolan Center for Justice at the American Conservative Union Foundation
- Juan Gomez, executive director and co-founder of Milpa, and part of the Coahuiltecan Nation out in Texas and northern Mexico.
- Rabbi Jonah Pesner, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

Moderator Simon Greer:

I'm going to invite our first panel of testifiers to come up and join us: Stephen Walker, William Young, Millie Brown is not here today with us but her colleague Tara Keaton will be offering her testimony, and Bryanna Mellen.

This first panel entitled I'm Not Okay, will share with you firsthand accounts from retired and current correctional staff and family members who all have firsthand experience with what it's like to work in and live in and around corrections.

For far too long the culture in corrections has been you just suck it up, you don't talk about it. Or maybe you tell war stories to kind of blow off steam, but to really tell your story firsthand and convey the impact that this life experience, this work experience has had on you is something we've done far too little. A lot of corrections officers will tell you, and I know some of them, they'll say, "I don't want to talk about that, I don't want to share that, I'll take care of it myself".

This is a brave, brave move by all four of you to be here today and to share your experience with the commission. I know the commissioners and the audience are super eager to hear from you. We know this is a career and a profession that has been overlooked and undervalued, and this is a chance for us to begin to turn that ship around.

So with that, I'm going to ask Stephen Walker to speak first.





TESTIFIER #1
STEPHEN WALKER

Morning Commissioners. Wellness is preventative care. I imagine that the prevention for a prep cook is fundamentally different than the prevention for a chain saw logger. So therefore, meaningful reform, meaningful prevention requires context. A need for research and understanding. To that point, I contend that we as a society endorse the intentional purpose and design of prison, understanding the context of an environment of punishment. With that, I'd like to pose a question to you. But first, looking at the credentials, the experience and insight in this room, and recognizing that for all of our work, study and insight, the complexities of the impact of prison are so vast and imperceptible that it will require our combined continued meditation and vetting for resolution. So my question is - how could a single correctional officer be expected to understand and process an environment that doesn't differentiate? And when it is real to them, they are most likely in crisis and questioning everything, including their own thoughts.

I can tell you that the correctional crisis centrifuge is debilitating.

My name is Stephen Walker. I raised the issue of experience, insight and crisis. My 35 years as an officer has vested a little of all of that in me. For context, I've been fired, suspended, assaulted, gassed, tased; intervened in fights, stabbings, riots. I've seen the loss of life. I almost lost my wife, my family and myself. As a union advocate I band aided the unidentified and misdiagnosed effects of stress, trauma and crisis in myself and in my fellow officers. But for the last 12 years, Mission One has been trying to find other individuals to help us raise the awareness of the impact of the correctional environment on people. That's why I'm here today. Wellness.

I believe that there are three issues that must be addressed in order to accomplish any sustainable or effective program. The first is contextual understanding. The second is a recognition of humanity. The third is collaboratively developed, research based educational services. So for the next few minutes, we're going to get deeper into the challenge. And that challenge is preventing and mitigating the undisclosed and under acknowledged harm the intentional design and operations of prisons perpetuates.

See, we all know there is a problem. But until recently, the fault of that failure fell at the feet of the individual officer. Again for context, may I ask, does anyone in here know anyone that wants to go to prison? Now, ask yourself why? And then why not? Apply that to the psyche of a correctional officer that actually does go to a prison every single day to the tune of about 2088 hours in a year. Again, context. If you sleep 8 hours a day throughout a year, that's 2920 hours.

It's time to shine some light into the subconscious closet of society. And acknowledge that the purpose and intention of prison is punishment, and from that is an environment that is anomalous to our societal structure, how we choose to live and engage with one another. It is also an environment that is essentially a minefield of fear, desperation, distrust and uncertainty. So until we can change prisons what suffers is our combined humanity. And at the leading edge of that humanity is the correctional officer.

Look, our officers come with good intentions. They come to satisfy basic necessities food, shelter, clothing, Disney plus. And to be self-sufficient, to grow out of our parents households. But we also come to be a contribution, to serve with honor. And that service comes laden with humanity, a humanity that presents sometimes as a fallacy of perfection that's developed and or exacerbated by our academy process and our hiring process. We developed this black or white mentality, this us versus them, which leads, unfortunately, to cognitive dissonance. See, we developed this fault, this perception, that fault or failure is seen as an assault on our sense of identity. And, we believe that any admittance of weakness is a failure that could cost us everything. So all of our questioning thoughts, feelings and beliefs—we actively press down underneath things like, 'Oh, you can handle it. Oh, ain't no crying toughen up. Or, only crazy people need counseling.'

And the silent one that most of us don't know exists are ACEs - adverse childhood experiences, which are probably burning underneath each and every one of us. Which makes the next point, education, so vital. Agencies must have a pre genesis through exodus awareness and responsibility to the holistic wellbeing of its employees. They must intentionally, but sagaciously dispel the stigma surrounding self-care and within themselves they have to acknowledge that there are inherent mental and behavioral health dangers that arise out of this environment, and additionally acknowledge that the entry level knowledge, skills and ability that they intentionally hire for are probably insufficient to self care in this environment.

Unfortunately, since we're not starting from scratch, we're going to have to build this on the fly and the two engines of propulsion are research and education, and that's going to require partnerships because we as corrections have to acknowledge that the silos and the walls that we operate within and behind, got us here. And that mental and behavioral health is not our strength. So agencies must reach out to academia and mental and behavioral health organizations and work in concert. To evaluate the health and the harms of systems on people and use that same energy that they use for hiring and screening to make sure that we're healthy and disciplined when we're injured, and apply that to prevention and mitigation. And a key component of that has to be coordination, not control. They have to actively listen and engage and echo back for validation what they hear, but without judgment. Seeking ways to impose and then evaluate with mental and behavioral health practitioners and develop cross assessments and process back with the staff before you operationalize it. And develop assisted follow through not enforcement. See this is prevention and in prevention we normalize our conversations about how disease of this environment, generated in us, isn't happening to you. Now the choices are not simple, but they are clear.

Acts Chapter 16, verse 26 through 28 - I asked you, will you cry out and say, we are here? We can continue, as we have since around 62 A.D. on this trajectory or we can recognize there are human beings with feelings, frailties and good intentions. And take a chance on developing services that heed and protect humanity.

Now, knowing that my time is running out, I conclude that we need acknowledgment that the environment of prison has a deleterious impact on humanity, which is going to require coordinated partnerships, research,

intentionally developed services and support for people. I know it's going to be psychically numbing, but ...

we ask you not to give up on us.

Together, we can create meaningful prevention against the impacts of the prison environment.

In closing, I offer the assertion of the World Health Organization that health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

I had an epiphany as I was walking back in the rain, it wasn't raining when I left. You can be in the rain and the rain doesn't care if you're a correctional officer, or an incarcerated individual, it's going to soak you.

Thank you.



TESTIFIER #2
WILLIAM YOUNG

Good Morning.

It is an incredible honor and privilege to speak to you today in our nation's capital, on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of brave men and women who selflessly serve their communities behind the walls and the wire of the world's correctional facilities. Their dedication, their sacrifice, their struggles, and their strength, deserve to be recognized and rewarded and I would be remiss if I didn't take this opportunity to publicly praise their efforts and officially, on the record, regard them as heroes.

Commissioners, my name is William Young and I've been a Correctional Officer for 17 years. I'm the author of two books, *When Home Becomes a Housing Unit* and *The Nothing That Never Happened*. In both books, I address and share examples of how this profession can negatively impact an officer's personal life, outside, out of uniform. I also host a podcast and create correctional content on YouTube with the intention of providing relevant and relatable information to aspiring, current, retired, or retiring correctional officers with a focus on highlighting the emotional damage that officer's incur from prolonged exposure to the correctional environment. I appreciate you being here today and your willingness to entertain my testimony.

Shortly after I had published my first book, I received a message through Facebook. And this message, this communication, became a moment that I'll never forget. This message, this moment became a sobering source of motivation, reinforcing the importance of making the mental health and wellness of Correctional Officers a priority.

On Thursday, January 23, 2020, I was in my studio pretending to be productive when my phone vibrated. It was another message! I felt a flood of excitement rush through my body as my brain hit me with a tiny dose of dopamine. I love getting messages. I love interacting and engaging with my audience. I value their thoughts, their opinions, and their feedback, and I'm so appreciative when they take time out of their day to reach out and connect.

Anticipating praise for my latest project, I grabbed my phone and flipped it over to see who had messaged me.

I opened up the message and had to stop reading it almost immediately. Seven words into the message my throat tightened and my eyes began to well up. Those first seven words were “I recently lost my husband to suicide”. This was not a “Hey I read your book and it was awesome” or a “How can I get a signed copy sent to me in Australia” type of message, this was different, this was real, this was one of my absolute worst nightmares coming to fruition on my phone.

Commissioners, have you ever had one of those moments when time stops and the silence of your surroundings becomes unbearable, a moment when you realize that you were in way over your head, a moment when you can’t find the words to adequately describe how you feel because you can’t feel a thing? This was that.

Frozen with fear and floating in my own head, I continued to read. The message read “I recently lost my husband to suicide. He was a correctional officer seeking help for correctional fatigue.”

The author of this message went on to say that her husband had been having some troubles at his facility, and that he had run into some situations that he wasn’t sure how to deal with. She said he had spoken to management in search of a solution, but instead of receiving help, he was reassigned to another area of the facility, to work with a lower custody level. There he patiently waited, for treatment, for support, for something. And that move, the change of atmosphere helped, a little, for a while. But unfortunately, the reality is, major injuries, serious symptoms of anxiety and depression rarely subside on their own overnight. We can’t just miraculously mend ourselves emotionally, regenerating the missing pieces like a starfish following a traumatic injury.

It became clear to me as I read on that her husband was fighting two different wars on two different fronts. On the one hand, he was wrestling with whatever had changed him, damaged him, whatever had affected him to the point that he realized that he couldn’t carry the weight of it by himself any longer and on the other hand, he was battling the stigma that surrounds Correctional Officers (*and other First Responders, Military, Emergency Service workers*) when they reach out for help.

I want to unpack that last paragraph so you understand what we're dealing with as we move forward with this conversation of the emotional and psychological impact of working in this profession.

As Officers, we are trained very well to do the job. We are shown how to handle the seizures and the stabbings and the searches. We are taught CPR/First Aid, tactical handcuffing, and Verbal Judo. We are shown where to stand when we're speaking with an inmate and how to extinguish a fire by pulling, aiming, squeezing, and sweeping.

Hours of instruction are given by dedicated professionals in an attempt to prepare us for the things that we'll encounter inside, on shift. But where we lack as a profession, is providing information and resources to staff about the emotional impact that responding to a medical emergency or a severe assault or an attempted or completed suicide can have on an Officer. We aren't told that these events will forever change us so when they do, when the nightmares come, when the self-isolation and the unwarranted agitation alter the way we interact with people off duty, we're caught off guard.

We're left fighting an enemy that we didn't even know existed, a threat we didn't know we were facing.

Sun Tzu, a Chinese General, military strategist, and author of *The Art of War* wrote "If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle."

And that's the problem. We don't know our enemy. We're taught that the enemy is the population that we supervise, when in reality the enemy is the correctional environment in its entirety. Our enemy isn't just the fights and the felons, it's the culture. It's the colorless, cold, and unforgiving concrete that confines not only those incarcerated but us as well.

The tragedy is that by the time the husband of the woman who sent this message to me understood what was happening to him, he felt like it was too late. The enemy, the correctional environment had successfully snuck up

on him rendering him defenseless. In desperation he reached out to a fellow Correctional Officer.

Now a civilian or someone unfamiliar with the correctional career field may overlook the importance of him asking for help. An outsider may not understand the strength that it took for him to admit that there was a problem. Because in most professions, admitting that you're scared or stressed or that you have concerns with certain aspects of the job isn't a big deal. Outside, in other industries speaking to others about anxiety or depression isn't a career ending conversation but inside, in corrections, it can be.

See, there's this little thing called stigma that scares the crap out of people that work in the correctional profession. And stigma, in case you're not familiar, is, according to the Oxford Languages dictionary, a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person.

The woman wrote in her message that her husband had reached out to a coworker despite that stigma, despite the risk of appearing weak, despite the shame, the disgrace, and the dishonor that he could've been subjected to. Despite the danger, he reached out and asked for help. She went on to say that the Officer that he reached out to and spoke with was familiar with my mission, my material, and gave him a copy of my book.

She said her husband took the book, brought it home, and read it cover to cover. And after finishing the book, he gave it to his wife and asked her to read it. He was once again reaching out. By giving the book to his wife to read and by saying that he could relate was him saying that he was hurting, that he needed help, that he wanted her to understand what it was that he was going through. He needed her to know where his head was at.

He told her that he felt like a monster and that he hated it. He told her that there's so much that he wanted to say and talk about but he didn't feel like anyone would understand what he was going through.

That's the stigma. She wanted to understand, wanted to help him, but he told her that he felt he was too far gone for that.

Days after that conversation an argument erupted between the two of them. She wrote "I'm nine months pregnant with our first child and when he would snap into CO mode he wasn't himself..."

She said she had fixed him a sandwich and for some reason it angered him.

It sent him into a rage. It invoked an emotional response that was so explosive, so over the top that she wasn't sure what was happening. She said that her husband went to the bedroom and came back out with a gun in his hand. A gun that he had given to her for her birthday just a few months earlier. She wrote...

“He shot himself right in front of me.”

Commissioners, after reading this, I felt so empty, so useless, so confused. All I could do was hang my head.

After consulting with my wife and conjuring up the courage, I called the woman and had a conversation with her about her husband. It was one of the hardest conversations I have ever had but I'm glad that I did. We talked about her husband and about her family and she thanked me for writing my book. She told me that what I was doing mattered. She said that what I was doing was important and that I needed to continue to reach out and to write and to communicate with Correctional Officers because there are those out there like her husband that are struggling and maybe, if we can catch them sooner, we can save them.

And that's what I'm trying to do. For her. For him. For us.

Commissioners, these stories are not unique, they are not anomalous.

Unfortunately, the testimonies that you have heard here this morning are the truth and the reality of countless correctional officers across the globe. We are fighting an enemy that we didn't even know existed, a threat we didn't know we were facing and we are in need of some help.

And that's where you come in. Through your offered ears, your open mind, and your willingness to participate in a conversation about a profession that is often unseen, you have already shown intention. You have already shown a semblance of support that is essential for us to push this movement forward, for us to finally receive the respect, the recognition, and the resources we deserve.

Commissioners, I will leave you with this.

Henry G. Bohn wrote in his 1855 publication, A Hand-book of Proverbs that “The road to hell is paved with good intentions” and I agree. Without action, without follow-through, intentions to address the mental health and wellness of correctional officers are meaningless.

We need to act. Together we have the ability, the power to rescue, to salvage, to save the lives of correctional officers by creating a movement that challenges our current culture and cultivates an environment where staff are comfortable to ask for help and are confident that they will find it.

Thank you.





TESTIFIER #3

TARA KEATON

(READING TESTIMONY WRITTEN BY MILAGROS BROWN)

Good morning distinguished guests of the Blue-Ribbon Commission, my name is Milagros Brown. I have 20 years with the Connecticut Department of Corrections currently serving as a Lieutenant. I'm a member of CSEA/SEIU Local 2001 and President of the Correction Supervisors Council (CSC). I became involved with the union, almost from the beginning of my career, when a coworker invited me and picked me up to attend a meeting. As time went on, and I enjoyed helping others, I ran for election to be Secretary on the Executive Board. I served in that capacity for two years. I was eventually promoted to Lieutenant and joined the union which represents approximately 500 members consisting of Lieutenants, Captains, Counselor Supervisors, Parole Managers, and Deputy Wardens.

I come to you today in reference to the detrimental impact that this job has on Correctional employee's health, especially our mental health. The physical and mental consequences that result over the years working in this profession had already reached a severe point of crisis, which has only been intensified by the current pandemic. It is my hope that after providing you all with a greater understanding of the ways this work impacts our health, you can help to raise awareness around the need to develop programs and increase support for this workforce worldwide.

Correctional employees work in a very negative setting which takes a toll on our overall well-being. We are often required to work involuntary overtime, meaning 16-hours straight, which can only allow for 3 to 4 hours of sleep in between shifts. The effect minimal sleep has on an individual can cause you to be exhausted driving to and from work, less alert on the job, as well as decreased family time just to name a few things. It is also not uncommon to experience bodily fluids being thrown at you which may come in contact with your face. In some instances you may even be physically assaulted. The staff working in our nation's prisons and jails are largely hidden from the public eye, considered essential employees in some instances and non-essential in others, despite the fact that our work doesn't change. For example, this workforce was considered critical infrastructure personnel who went into known congregate settings where Covid-19 existed and performed their daily duties without hesitation.

Telework was not an option as correctional facilities are operating twenty-four seven, three hundred and sixty-five days a year. With correctional employees suffering from high rates of PTSD, Depression and Substance Abuse under normal circumstances, it should come as no surprise that this workforce experienced even higher levels of stress during this timeframe. The fear of contracting Covid on the job, bringing it home to a loved one, or knowing that the possibility existed that a family member passed away from Covid and you unknowingly gave it to them, added stress. This along with the day-to-day operations within a correctional facility has a tremendous effect on all individuals, those both working and living in these facilities, and it also impacts their loved ones.

Prior to joining this union the members were working in collaboration with the University of Connecticut (UConn) to develop a program designed by union members. The idea was to implement a program that would begin to address ways to obtain overall better health for this workforce. The program was started due to the fact that too many funerals needed to be attended due to staff deaths. Too many staff deaths.

The union wanted to find a way to promote a healthier lifestyle and help members restore a little bit each day. The first topic of discussion was sleep in which an app was created to monitor how much sleep the members were getting on a weekly basis. We currently have one day of Wellness Training incorporated in our contract. This one day of training has its curriculum developed and presented by the members. Since implementation we've had discussion on such topics as sleep, healthy eating tips, and mental health. Mental health is currently being discussed at this year's training and it seems to be the most talked about with our members. I believe this program has the potential to have great success as it's been developed and taught by the members currently working in this job force.

In closing I would like to express my gratitude to any union leaders, mental health workers, administrators, and legislators who have helped to establish correctional staff wellness programs. But sadly, these are the exception not the rule, and so I hope you can all join me in advocating strongly for the creation of programs and increased support for correctional employees and their families.

Staff wellness programs should begin at the academy and continue through retirement...

and all correctional facilities should include annual training on mental health and stress reduction coping skills for all active-duty staff, including administrators.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today about this important matter.

Staff wellness programs should begin at the academy and continue through retirement, and all correctional facilities should include annual training on mental health and stress reduction coping skills for all active-duty staff, including administrators.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today about this important matter.





TESTIFIER #4
BRYANNA MELLEN

Good morning. Thank you all for taking the time to be here today. My family's story is something that I wish I could say was rare. But unfortunately, tragedies like this affect corrections families far more than the general public realizes.

August 25th, 2011. My mom and I had been staying at my Aunt and Uncle's house for a few weeks with the hopes that it would finally convince my father to get the help that he truly needed. I had just gotten back from shopping with friends when my phone started ringing. It was my brother. I answered and the first words, he said were 'do you know why there are police and an ambulance at our house?' A neighbor had just called him, asking if we were okay. Knowing the state that my father was in I knew things instantly were not okay. I got into my car and drove about 90 miles per hour through our small town. I turned the corner onto our street and I saw our house surrounded by yellow tape. Every cop car in town and an ambulance in our driveway. I ran under the yellow tape and was practically tackled by a police officer. He asked me if I knew where my father would go if he was in trouble. I said I wasn't sure. They asked me if he owned any guns. I listed off what guns he owned and I heard over the radio that they thought one was missing. I said is my mom here, is she okay? And all he said was, she's alive. Which wasn't promising. They escorted me to a cruiser to answer some more questions. And then we went down to the station to answer some more questions. Finally, my brother and I insisted on going to the hospital to be with my mother.

Flashback to a few hours before I got that phone call, my father had texted my mom to see if she could come by the house after work so they could talk. My mom agreed and went to the house and found him in the living room sitting on the couch. My father asked my mother if she was coming home and she said not until you agree to get help. He then took out the gun that he had hidden under his couch cushion. I won't go into too much detail on what happened next.

But he knew what he was going to do and needed to stop my mom from interfering. A physical fight ensued, and once he was able to restrain her, he locked the doors and got into his car and drove. She had barely survived. On the road he called 911, reported that someone at our address needed medical attention. He then drove to a beach at a lake a few towns over, put his car in park and shot himself in the head.

My brother and I were at the hospital with my mom when a social worker took us into another room to tell us that they had found my dad and he had killed himself. I was 19 years old at the time and my brother was 17.

My father, Michael Mellen, retired a captain from Sousa Baranowski Supermax Prison in Massachusetts at the age of 45 after 22 years of working for the Department of Corrections. I truly had the best childhood growing up. My parents really made sure that we had everything we needed to be happy and comfortable. Little did we know our parents were sheltering us from a very dark world that my father experienced every day. He suffered from post-traumatic stress, depression, anxiety, and also battled an addiction with oxycodone. We weren't aware until after he died that he was being prescribed enough oxycodone to sedate an elephant, as one doctor described it. He was in this vicious cycle of being in mental and physical pain and then numbing the pain any way he could. The more pain he was in, the more he needed to numb until he was just an absolute shell of himself. One day he came home from work and told my mom that he could never go back to the prison again and he actually never went back.

During his time in retirement, he bounced around from job to job, trying to find his place in the world. But he struggled to find a workplace that valued his leadership and his experience in the prison as a supervisor.

He only lived about 18 months after he retired.

So I want to go back to the day that my dad died and talk about that critical moment where my mom said only if you agree to get help. That didn't come out of nowhere. My mom had been begging him to get help for years. She was the only person who he showed even a little bit of himself to.

She took care of him when he was going through withdrawals at the end of the month. She was constantly thinking of ways that my brother and I could try to cheer him up on his bad days. She really was the rock in our family. When she asked him to get help again that August when he was at his worst, she knew it was life or death. When they were sitting on the couch that day, her worst nightmare had come true.

But what if, by some miracle in that moment, he had agreed to get help? Where would we have even started? As a family we were so ill equipped to understand what my dad was going through and had no idea how to help him. I did not even understand at the time what depression or PTSD meant. I barely even understood what my dad did for a living. My mom tried everything she had in her toolbox to try to help him, but unfortunately, we just did not have the right tools. He did agree to couple therapies at one point, a few years before he died. But he refused to go back because he accused the therapist and my mom of conspiring against him. That was the last time he ever stepped foot inside a therapist's office. His extreme paranoia was at an all time high, and he trusted no one. And I know 22 years in corrections had a hand in that.

The day of my dad's wake, my mom, brother and I all stood next to my dad's casket and greeted everyone who came to pay their respects. Only two people from my dad's prison showed up and one of them handed my mother, still bruised from fighting for her life, a pamphlet on Officer Wellness. He didn't even have the energy to comprehend what had just happened. But looking back, you see how absolutely broken a system must be for a representative of the DOC to hand an officer's widow a pamphlet on Officer Wellness as they're standing next to his dead body. Where was this pamphlet when my dad first started the job? Where was this information when his coworkers, who he worked with almost 70 hours a week, started to see his mental health declining?

The state managed to make a horrific situation even harder on the family of a man who dedicated his life to serving. A few days after my dad's death, the state had issued his monthly retirement check automatically. Someone at the state realized that the check included the few days in August after my dad was declared dead. So they billed my mother for the rest of that extra money. So again, where would we have even started if he did agree to get help? Families need to be a part of this journey with their loved ones starting in the academy because negative effects of the job aren't inevitable. It's not if they're going to change, it's when they're going to change.

Your loved one eventually might not be able to sit with their back to a door or a crowded room. Your loved one may lose interest in the things that used to bring them joy. They might isolate and refuse to talk about work. They may turn to drugs or alcohol to cope and so on. But when they do start to change,

...the family needs to know what to look out for before it gets to that crisis point.

I believe that it should start right in the academy.

I co-founded a nonprofit when I was 20 for mental health awareness and suicide prevention for correction officers. One time our co-founder Julie and my mom went to go speak at an event for families of officers in the academy, which you think would be a great step in the right direction for what I was saying. Well, the sheriff's staff asked to see their speech and began censoring the things that they weren't allowed to say in front of the families as to not scare them. What they didn't realize was that the reality of this is scary. Our story is living proof of exactly how scary it can get. Correctional suicide is happening at an alarming and unnoticeable rate. No matter how scary it is to talk about, families need to know what to look out for before their loved one gets to the crisis point like my dad was at. If you can catch the symptoms early on, it's much more easier to treat and much more manageable.

If you were to give my family two options – 1, attend a few real and transparent informational classes about job stress, mental health, and what to look out for in your loved one or 2, watch your loved one slowly fade away, which then culminates into a psychotic break and almost a murder suicide - we would choose option 1 every single time. And I'm sure any family member of an officer would agree.

My father was strong willed, sarcastic, tough, and was the first person by your side if you needed help with anything. He showed up for everyone else but himself. I wish he had realized how much he meant to everyone around him, but I know who he was the day he died was not him anymore.

Soon after he passed away, I started to relate to how my father was feeling. In the aftermath of a suicide, I found myself also slipping away. I had so many unanswered questions after he died.

Mainly, why did he choose to leave us? Was it something I did or didn't do? Why weren't we good enough? Obviously, these were irrational thoughts. But ask any survivor of suicide and they will share these same inner thoughts. I know after 22 years in corrections and battling PTSD, depression, addiction, he just wasn't my father anymore. But the unanswered questions just ate away at me. I often turned to alcohol as my primary coping mechanism. I was reckless with my life and truly thought for a while that I was not worthy of living.

It wasn't until nine years and 11 months later, after my dad took his own life, that I was brave enough to finally ask for help. And I entered into a 30 day program in Utah to finally start addressing my own PTSD, depression and anxiety. My last day in Utah came just one week before the ten year anniversary of my father's passing. During my time there, I was able to face many of the demons I was battling and was able to let go of some of the baggage I had been carrying that was not mine to carry. I finally felt like I could breathe again. However, unfortunately, my story is just one of the many stories that can be told of people who are deeply affected by my father's suicide. My mom, who is in the audience today, is alive and happy and thriving, but she still struggles with intense PTSD and anxiety. My brother, who is two years younger than me, was so deeply traumatized by what happened that he moved to Maine and rarely speaks about my dad unless it's in a song he's written. My aunt and grandmother who were there for every step of my mom's physical and mental healing process. My stepdad, who loves my mother and us so unconditionally and has helped to heal three souls that he did not break with the patience of a saint. And many other family members, friends, neighbors and community members who his life and death has had a significant impact on.

One person I think about often is the kind soul who was at my father's side moments after he shot himself. I filed a FOIA so I could read the police report from the day my dad died because I was still on a mission to find any missing piece that could help me heal or answer some questions. I learned that a woman who was at the beach with her daughter that day heard the gunshot and rushed to my dad's car. She opened the door and sat with him, applying pressure to his head wound and didn't leave his side until the paramedics came. That woman's life was changed forever. A complete stranger that my dad's suicide has now touched. I had a conversation with one of my dad's best friends a few months ago. This friend was also the last person we know who saw him alive. He lived down the street from us and said that he saw my dad drive by on that day in August 25th. My dad waved to him like it was any other day and kept driving. What he didn't know was what had just happened at

our house between him and my mom. It wasn't until later that night that his friend found out that he was taking the last drive he would ever take. Through tears, he said, 'you know, I just thought he was waving hello, but he was really waving goodbye.'

At 19, I was never supposed to be sitting in a funeral home with my grandparents, picking out my father's memorial picture and writing his eulogy. I never imagined I would be four months pregnant and would not get to see the look on my dad's face when I tell him he was going to be a grandfather to a beautiful baby boy. I never thought I would be sitting in front of you telling the story. But if I can prevent this tragedy from happening to another family, to another little girl that really needed her father, that's my goal.

Thank you.



COMMISSIONER RESPONSES TO PANEL 1:



**COMMISSIONER
REVEREND TERRY MELVIN**

Thank you so much. The first thing I want to do is thank each of you for being here today and sharing your story with us. And I want to say to each of you that I hear you. I want that to resonate, that I hear you.

Brianna, you bring in a special piece to this story. You know, we are looking at the system, and what's going on within the system itself. We've heard that we have a broken system that deals with punishment versus rehab. We've heard of a system where it is not right, not accepted, for people to share their feelings and get the help they need. But you bring in a different perspective of the family outside that did not ask to be a part of this. And it's not being brought into the system to get a clear understanding on what to look for and what to be advised to deal with and how you can be brought into the system to help the person that's working within the system. So I thank you for your bravery in being here with us to bring that to the table for us. It is a compelling story, and I say again, I hear you.

To the rest of you, what we're dealing with here is a system that, as I am hearing right now, is broken. We don't have a system in place where we, and I'm talking to the royal we as correction officers, we don't have each other's back in a sense that if somebody is falling, we're picking them up. Rather we are ridiculing them. We've got to figure out how to deal with that. We've got to figure out how to, when somebody reaches out for help, that other correction officers are there to help them. We've got to figure out how do we create an environment within the system, this is what I'm hearing, that is open to identifying areas where workers need help and putting the help in place.

But I just, with my small amount of time that I have left, I just want to ask each one of you if you could just say one thing in the system that needed to change the priority for you, the one thing, one priority for you in the system with all the things you've talked about. What would that one priority that you would leave with us as commissioners to deal with?

TESTIFIER RESPONSES TO COMMISSIONER REV. TERRY MELVIN

Bryanna Mellen:

One priority, I think, and I kind of went through it in my speech, would be to include the families in the academy from the very beginning. And I think education for the families is very important on how they can recognize the warning signs in their loved ones early on and make it an open conversation and not so stigmatized.

Tara Keaton:

I would say wellness, I think, if you have a well-rounded staff member, it makes an easier day. So I believe wellness is very important.”

William Young:

I just think the information. We don't even know that this is a thing when we start. We're not told it, we're not taught it. We don't know when those things start, that the job and the environment is a cause of that. So we look for other examples. We think that we're who we were trained to be. We think we're doing a good job. We think this is how we're supposed to be, right? We're taught that people lie and manipulate and do all these things. The problem is we take that outside. And so when we start to change and turn into somebody that we weren't before we put on the badge, we're not even aware of that. Here's the thing, you know, there's a lot of research and stuff on how the environment affects the incarcerated. Right. But the analogy is this, they're the smokers, we get the second-hand smoke, but at the end of the day, we all get cancer. And so that information needs to be pushed on us right away, immediately. That, hey, you could be stabbed, but also, the threat of being stabbed every day for your entire career can also change you as well. So that's what I would say. Thank you.

Stephen Walker:

Reverend, that's, you're asking too much. It really is.

There's so much layered complexity of dynamics to this environment that affects humanity.

I think that's part of the problem, is that we don't recognize humanity in this.

It is a system built to isolate and contain and anything that compromises that mission is negligible, it's minutia. So the fact that your kids got a soccer game, the fact that it's your wedding anniversary, the things that exist in humanity mean nothing to the system. You're a body that we need to keep the system running. So I don't know how to answer that for you, Reverend. It is humanity, because in the absence of that, I mean, think about this for a second, with all the AI that's building up, in a sense, it's developing the ability to sense micro emotions and all of these other things, why do we need people?

Because the walls, we can legitimately build a box, stick people in, and problem solved, right? So why do we need people? Because that's not what the system is supposed to be about. It's supposed to be helping people restore, and re-access, reconnect to their humanity. But how can we help them do that, if we're now not allowed, actually we're punished, for displaying our own humanity?"



**COMMISSIONER
KEN DALLEY**

Good morning. First of all, I want to echo what Terrence had mentioned also, the courage to come up and testify. There's a lot of vulnerability that you guys have shown today, and it's something that is certainly going to help to shed a light for a lot of us and a lot of Americans, especially those who have not served behind the walls. But we certainly help to support the profession. There's a couple of things that some of you had mentioned "Don't give up on us. We need your help." I think those are things that are very simple, very poignant, being able to make sure that there's enough attention and resources provided.

I do have a question for those who have served, at least three or four of you. Not to exclude you, Brianna, and my condolences to you and appreciate the courage you've shown this morning. When you talk about staff wellness programs, and I agree, I think that is absolutely vital from day one, do you feel some level of deceit that they were not provided? Some level of honesty, candor about what you might, or how you might feel about the profession, whether that's 30 days in, three years in, a decade in?

And the second part is, are there any staff wellness programs that are provided today, any sort, whether it's maybe in the beginning or is there any resource available to correctional officers? We know that sometimes there are counselors that come around for inmates, for mental health. What is afforded to correctional officers today in your experiences?

TESTIFIER RESPONSES TO COMMISSIONER KEN DALLEY

Stephen Walker:

On the job application, there should be the same warning label that's on Cigarettes. This job has the potential to impact your well-being, your social engagement, cause hypertension, diabetes, you run the gamut. Actually, we did create a fake label, well, it's not fake, it's very much real. But yes, that deceit and it truly is the equivalent exchange, you pay me to do a job. What you're not disclosing about the job is the deceit, is the imbalance of that equivalent exchange. I'm giving you my heart, soul, energy, you know, presence. But you're taking, again, my humanity from me because you're telling me that I can't be the human being we all want when we're on the street and engaging. And I'll jump on a soapbox real quick, so I'm not gonna do that. But the second part, look, this is a nascent field. For everybody else in society there are phenomenal wellness programs. Trust me, we've been on this, I think all of us have been looking at what's going on outside and see the services that exist. But there are none that are—they're so nascent in application to us. There needs to be more, it needs to be more dynamic because what they're trying to overcome is so vast. And, like I said, we're not starting from scratch. There's a lot of trauma that already exists to try and get people to step up.

William Young:

This whole conversation's really complicated because everybody needs something different

...right. And so when you start to talk about a wellness program or developing something, everybody needs something, something different. And that's very difficult to tackle, especially if you've never worked the job, if you've never carried the keys. And like he said, we're 24 seven, we never stop. It's not like we can stop and have an Officer Appreciation Day where you feed me free hotdogs. Some of us still have to work.

Some of us are eating hotdogs in front of the people that we're supervising. It's bad. And she said it in her speech, there's an eight hour wellness training every year, once a year, 8 hours. Okay, very good. I took a 40 hour crisis intervention class to teach me how to talk, to de-escalate individuals incarcerated, 40 hours. But they gave me 8 hours to go home and say, hey, you know, I know you just did CPR in the shower on that kid and he's dead, and thank you, but we need you to work another shift, and then when you go home, try not to yell at your kids because we didn't give you the tools to process what you just saw. So for 8 hours a year, thank you very much for doing that. But this job you can see doesn't only affect me, it affects our family as well. Briana could be my daughter. And this is this is what it is. And the other part to that is because we've been neglected for so long, I don't trust anything you put forward.

Because I know that you're not going to follow through on anything because we're all going to sit here, we're going to talk about this and it's going to be fine, and then we're all going to go home, and I still have to work, I still have to deal with the same stuff that I dealt with before I came here. And so, until there's that follow through, until there's that genuine investment in my life, in my kid's life, then what am I going to do? I'm only going to come to work and care about what my coworkers are feeling, how they're feeling, how can we survive this shift and go home? Because for you, who goes home at 5:00pm, and I'm saying you as in leadership and people implementing these programs, your day ends, you go home and we don't, we have to stay there. Even when I'm home, I'm not home. There's a fantastic story by Ray Bradbury, the Rocket Man. You should read it, because that's what correctional officers are, I'm the Rocket Man. And when I'm in space, all I can think about is home. And when I'm at home, all I can think about is work. And that's only because I get my eight hour training that they check the box and say, 'Hey, here you go, you're good.' But that's not enough, that's just not enough for us.

Tara Keaton:

So I can echo what the both of them have said, and unfortunately, I think it's something that needs to begin in the beginning. Yes, we did take a step, and the only reason my union has taken a step is because we have noticed that there have been so many deaths. And we've had members that have retired and died a month after retirement. So, do I think it's enough? No, I don't. I think it needs to start in the beginning. The 8 hours that they give us, yes, is it good for the members, absolutely. But that's something we negotiated. That's our union negotiating that, not the agency giving it to us. That is them recognizing, yes, there is a problem. But is 8 hours enough? No. So do I think there needs to be more? Yes, I do.



**COMMISSIONER
DARIELLE KENNEDY**

So my father has been incarcerated for 20 years, and so I resonated a lot with what you were saying, Bryanna, about that loss and about that grieving. I always fear getting that phone call and not knowing, not having those answers, probably not having the accessibility of filing a freedom of information act to know what it will be that will possibly end my father's life, whether it's Covid, whether it's another incarcerated person, whether it's somebody showing excessive force in any type of situation. Also missing those moments, like you said, you had a beautiful child. I'll be graduating in a week and he still won't be here. And so I really resonated with that sense of loss and that sense of grief, although yours is very different from mine. And usually before I did Bridging the Gap, it would have been this us versus them narrative where I wouldn't have even been able to hear the stories of correctional officers or even hear about your own loss and think about correctional officers' family members, because my focus was on incarcerated people's family members because I am one. And so I did want to get into some of what you all were talking about, the seemingly competing narratives about this experience of the threat of being stabbed, but you also wanting to be able to help incarcerated people to be able to reconnect and be able to show humanity on both sides for correctional officers and incarcerated people. And so how is it that this prison culture can be changed where we acknowledge that you do have this threat of harm every day when you go in to work, but then you also want to achieve this responsibility of helping incarcerated people reconnect - in what ways have you already done this work, or in what ways do you think that this work can be done?

TESTIFIER RESPONSES TO COMMISSIONER DARIELLE KENNEDY

William Young:

So the job has changed a little bit from 20 years ago when we would just lock people up, throw them in a cell and just let them be. Now, it's rehabilitation, it's reintegration, it's acclimation to society. The problem is we haven't changed the training of the officers. So I'm still taught to do the job the way I was taught 20 years ago. But then they're introducing, you know, mental health programs and all of these avenues for the incarcerated to better themselves. And then they're still having us supervise that. The problem is, I don't have any understanding of what any of that is unless I go get it myself. Right. And so my role from custody staff is now almost more of a counselor role, to be supportive. And I'm currently working community corrections so I'm involved in that process of helping people find jobs, helping people get their GEDs, things like that, little things that I took for granted because somebody showed me how to, that now we're showing them how to do. But I think that because we're not taught, our training hasn't changed to match that, we're not shown the importance of that, hey if this person betters themselves inside because they get out and then our kids go to school at the same school, we all hang out at the same place - So we want them to be better, you need to show us the importance of that. And you need to change the training.

Just for a simple example, 20 years ago, somebody kicking on a door was just being a jerk. Now they may be having a psychotic episode. They may be, you know, schizophrenic or bipolar or something like that. If I don't know that, if I'm not aware of the mental health challenges and things like that, then we're going to handle it differently. Right. But now kind of the push is slow that down a little bit. And so what I've done is I've gone and tried to find and read everything I can on mental health, on communication, on de-escalation, on whatever I can. Because you realize after a while that jail and prison is not what you thought it was before you went there. Right. That that these people are just people passing through, that turned left instead of turning right, and that's what it is. And so you start to deal with them as humans, as individuals. And then that's where like the progress goes.

So there's a saying that I hate and that people have said to me a hundred times, they say, don't talk to me like an inmate, when I am outside at home and I get kind of crabby with people. Everybody here is probably heard that. But the reality is, I'm not talking to them like an inmate. I'm actually talking more disrespectful to them than I do the inmates. Right.

And it's because we have that working relationship, because we're in there together, because I'm invested, I spend all of my time, my emotional energy in helping them do what they have to do, helping them get their ID, helping them navigate this course. But then when I go home, I don't have any left for my kids. Right. So our training, again, everything for me is you have to know what the problem is. And if we say, hey, this job is not what it was 20 years ago, the focus cannot be what it was 20 years ago. Why don't you learn this? Why don't you read this? Why don't we have continuing education on mental health so officers are better equipped to handle that situation? It'll be safer for everybody.



**COMMISSIONER
AMANDA RIPLEY**

Thank you all. I've learned a lot from listening to you. I used to cover courts and crime and I visited many prisons and I wrote about incarcerated individuals and I wrote about crime victims. And I'm embarrassed to say I never really thought that much about corrections officers until I met Andy and heard the stories of other corrections officers. And you start to realize, I think you said it, Mr. Walker, that there's like this us versus them lens we got going in a lot of parts of our country. It breaks down. The more you listen to people's stories. Right. There's not a bright line between incarcerated individuals from what you're telling me. Right. And corrections officers. You can't separate the father from the corrections officer. You can't separate the mother from the crime victim. Like you just can't put people in these boxes the way the system and the discourse wants to. And often journalists, Democrat or Republican, like all these things break down at some point, to the point where I hope one day we can all become as suspicious as you all are of those splitting techniques, in politician's rhetoric, in the news media—that's splitting. And the more anxiety and uncertainty people feel, I've noticed, the more they split the world into good versus evil. So it's very tempting, right, to do that. I wonder if you have anything you'd like to say or things that you wish members of the news media understood? I don't know in your community, the way that they write about the criminal justice system or about the facilities that you work in. What would be your ask of journalists?

TESTIFIER RESPONSES TO COMMISSIONER AMANDA RIPLEY

Stephen Walker:

Real quick, I don't write really well, so I use a program called Grammarly. And I was writing this article and had the word prison guard in it. It highlighted the word and said 'this is archaic and may be offensive'. And I'm like, you got to be kidding me, how is it that this program knows this but all these writers keep writing Prison Guard. US versus them. Prison guards are supposed to be barbaric, brutal, uneducated, susceptible to bribes. Name one movie, one that depicts prison guards in a positive light. There's only one, and if you get it I'll get up and give you a hug. Rubin, Hurricane Carter. The warden was a jerk, no offense wardens, but the officer, he showed Rubin compassion, understanding, empathy, he called him sir, he let him work, and wear hospital scrubs as opposed to the uniform because Rubin refused to admit that he was a criminal. Look, we live with these guys. This amount of compassion and understanding goes a hell of a lot further than any physical exertion that you can apply to an individual. And the other part of it is that I started at age 24 and a dude that was in one of my living units, went to middle school, high school and college with me. And he was behind the door and knew my nickname, knew I ran track, knew my best friend's name. So there's no line,

...there's no us versus them. We are us.
Period.

And I don't even know what your question was!



**COMMISSIONER
MARY KAY HENRY**

I just wanted to express how incredibly powerful what each and every one of you said to me. And how I thought a lot about the 100,000 corrections officers in our union and how little I understand about the weight that is carried by those officers every day and that you transformed through your story and understanding that is beyond what I've been able to absorb in my relationship with corrections officers, because I was thinking about Millie. I know Millie as the president of the union. I see Millie care deeply about all the corrections officers that she represents, but I don't really understand the enemy and the threat in the way that you described it. And ...

I've never really understood the system and the structure that you're challenging, that robs everybody of their humanity.

And that that's structured in. I've gotten little insights from people before, but this panel powerfully conveyed both inside the wall but also at home and then the impact on family in a way that I, I really hope as commissioners that we will work with one voice to override your completely legitimate distrust, that anything's ever change. And that somehow we can make change happen together. And then the other thing you four didn't get a chance to see, but that I wanted to convey, was the number of nodding heads in this room that makes you understand that it is a system that is robbing people of their ability to be fully human, not just at work, but in their entire life. And that is wrong and it's outrageous and enough is enough. And I just wanted to thank Andy for taking this to a national conversation where the secret's out and the silence is broken and we have to act together. And it's just an incredible honor. And I'm incredibly grateful for you connecting our heads, hearts and minds. I realize that I look at the men primarily and some women in this room that I've had decades of relationships with, but that I don't understand. And I have to admit to you, I'm ashamed of it.

Because it's just a reflection of how that structure kept us from understanding what one another was going through and how the union could be a vehicle for, beyond the 8 hours, how are we challenging the entire system, and changing it? So I just wanted to express my deep, deep gratitude for the panelists, but also One Voice United for putting the commissioners in front.

TESTIFIER RESPONSES TO COMMISSIONER MARY KAY HENRY

Stephen Walker:

Ms. Henry, it's not your fault. It's the system that teaches us not to tell people what we go through.

BREAK



Moderator Simon Greer:

Welcome back, everybody. Hope you got a chance to catch your breath. I'm about to introduce panel number two, but I first wanted to urge folks to maybe take a glance to your left and to your right. We heard some very powerful stories this morning. For some people that may have brought up things that you don't talk about everyday, things that you're handling, processing, dealing with yourself or trying not to deal with yourself. And so just take a look around, check in on whoever is nearby you. And if those discussions, those presentations, those brave testimonies do provoke something in you, please do reach out, don't feel like you have to now sit with it by yourself or alone or in private.

Panel number two is entitled 'Another Way is Possible'. The idea here is that we have three experts coming from very different perspectives, backgrounds, experiences, and their sharing with us, with the commission, and with all of you, is meant to build on what we heard from the first panel, to build on those firsthand accounts and testimonies and talk to what can we do about some of these things? As many of our panelists said this morning on panel one, those were real individual stories, but they were not isolated to these individuals. This is system wide. This affects everybody that the system touches. So we have three people with us now who are going to share a little bit about their perspective on that, their knowledge, and some of their ideas.



TESTIFIER #1
DR. MIKE PITTARO

Good morning, everyone. My name is Dr. Mike Pittaro. I'm an Associate Professor of Criminal Justice with the American Military University and Adjunct with East Stroudsburg University in Pennsylvania.

I think, first of all, holy crap, to try to be the next speaker after those four had spoken is a little bit more difficult. So during the break, I had to like pivot a little bit and switch some things around there and gather my thoughts. That was powerful. I don't think I've ever been at an event or a conference or anything where it actually really got to me and choked me up, even though I know about this. Hearing it firsthand from others, you know, outside of your own experiences is pretty powerful.

Right around 2007, one of the individuals I had worked with in corrections had died by suicide. It came as a shock, or at least we thought it came as a shock. After, you know, you reflect on it a while, you start to see the signs and symptoms that were there and didn't really necessarily do anything. He would come into work disheveled, he kind of just appeared like he wasn't sleeping much and everything like that. But at the time, the climate of corrections was a little bit more punitive in that respect, if you mentioned anything about any weaknesses or what was perceived to be weaknesses or vulnerabilities that could be held against you. And when I moved into administration, I can assure you it was held against you. So that's a huge part of this.

But as I kind of stepped into roughly about my 16th year in corrections, I started to feel some things. I was burning out. I was stressed. I felt like I was hitting a brick wall. I felt like my voice wasn't heard anymore. The stress started to get to me, led to marital problems, marital problems then bled into work, work bled into the marriage. And it just became this very cumulative type of despair. And if anybody has ever experienced depression, deep dark depression, you feel like you're just lost, you're lonely, you have nowhere to go to. And I'm sure everyone in the room can attest to the fact that in this profession, you're supposed to be in control, you're supposed to maintain that control. You're the helper, you're the fixer.

And that's my personality as well. But I couldn't fix myself. And so I found myself digging deeper into this depression to the point where I was scared. I started having really dark thoughts and couldn't get myself out of it. And I didn't trust anybody to talk to, my own family, close friends, especially people I worked with for fear of judgment. You know, I helped people, not Mike Pittaro in trouble, he doesn't get in trouble. I help others. And so it was a panic mode that led to that.

Thankfully, I worked my way through it. And that's kind of how, or rather what, led to me actually focusing on this as an educator. So, my personal experience, combined with the education and experience of working in corrections, kind of helped catapult this to a new direction. So, when I left corrections, I became executive director of an outpatient facility thinking, okay, that maybe is the cure all. That didn't necessarily work as well. So, I had started teaching in 2002 and loved it, worked part time, it was positive, rewarding, students got it and it just was a better feeling. But I still couldn't shake, you know, the fact that others I had worked with, that still stayed in corrections were still dying, whether it's dying by suicide or as mentioned earlier, dying by some type of physical illness, mostly cardiovascular disease. You know, with the average life expectancy of age 59 and I'm 55 as of this current day, that's a huge reality check that I'm not ready to die. So that's a huge problem. So it's beyond the mental health challenges, but it's also the physical challenges.

So, this is kind of like a back story, but I wrote this article in 2017. It was just basically an interest of mine and it was titled

‘Correctional Officers Are Dying, It's Time For An Open Discussion.’

That article, which really wasn't anything profound or anything, but it opened the door, in a sense to others reading it and saying, Oh my God, same issue here. So that expanded then into trainings, it expanded into other conferences and publications and consulting about this. And what I learned quickly was, as I delved into the research, is that there is no research. Or at the time it was extremely limited, compared to law enforcement, where there is an abundance of literature on law enforcement with mental health issues. But with corrections, the paucity of research was just so limited.

So I had to dig deeper and found some studies that once again limited but kind of grasped what I wanted to tell. So then I realized quickly that it wasn't just a Mike Pittaro problem, it wasn't just a Department of Corrections in Pennsylvania problem. This was nationwide, this was international. This is the culture of corrections, particularly in the United States, that is very toxic. And so in order to truly help ourselves, we will in turn help those who are incarcerated as well. This kind of has a ripple effect.

So, when I published this article, it then led to some other publications on that, and I decided to kind of expand a little bit further. I wanted to find out, alright, we know what the signs are, we know what the symptoms are, and right now we know what the causes are, but what can we do to prevent it? You know, what can we do to minimize those symptoms and those feelings that we have? So, I kind of took it on like a multi-pronged approach. And I started delving into, you know, physical fitness, physical activity. When I say fitness, some people get, oh my God, you know, but some types of things like that, some type of activity where you're moving. Then going into eating healthier and trying to work on the physical end of it as well, because we have high rates of, you know, high blood pressure, high cholesterol. So trying to address those issues as well as tackling the fact that we need some type of stress reduction, some type of stress outlet for ourselves. For me personally, it's working out, I like to work out. I know some people do not like to work out. You know, I know people that run, I hate running, I've tried it numerous times and I don't get it, I don't get that whole joggers high that they talk about, I can run five miles, I'm still not high, so I gave that up, so working out is my outlet. But walking, anything, walking your dog, just something to get you out there, but more importantly, to focus on ourselves. Because I think we have a tendency to kind of care for those around us, but not necessarily care for ourselves. And that's a huge problem for me personally. And I think many will agree with this. It was hard to open up. I think that I had to swallow my pride and to share my feelings, and that was a tough one for me. And so trying to get over that stigma, of basically ourselves, getting out of our own way is a huge issue right there.

But I then led into research on leadership because one of the areas of concerns that's come up in the surveys has been leadership, whether it's poor leadership, whether it's deficient weak leadership or leadership, just not supporting you or not feeling that you're valued or any type of empowerment. I focused on transformational leadership, something that I'm a huge advocate for.

I am an advocate for that coaching, mentoring, type of mentality. It worked for me in corrections. It works for me in education. It's something I embrace and I've been trying to spread that around. Not that it's everybody's cup of tea, but it works for me and trying to have that different type of thought process. For example, when I was in corrections at the time, I've always been a visionary, kind of thinker and I always have been ambitious, like...

'Florida's doing this cool program, we should try this at the prison'

...'nah we're not going to try that'

...'but I'm like, why?'

... 'No, no, no, we're not going to try that.'

And it was just ended like that. So every time I had an idea, it was just squashed with 'No we're not going to do that'. You know the 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it' type of thing. But it was broken and that's the thing. It was broken and nobody was trying to fix the system. So, leadership was a huge issue. And then when I went into becoming an administrator, I couldn't actually kind of pass those policies and procedures to get everybody on board because those that were above me in the hierarchy were squashing those ideas. And I think that part of that problem, too, is for those who have moved into administration, sometimes there's a tendency to forget your roots, to forget where you came from. And so we would make decisions as leaders of corrections and yet not include the correctional officers who are actually implementing those policies and procedures, which made absolutely no sense to me.

And so it's trying to combine the two that we're all trying to address a similar problem here, that if we want to increase morale or improve morale and we want to, you know, increase our retention here from officers using corrections as a stepping stone to other positions and trying to retain those officers, we need to make some changes. So I focused on leadership. I focus on the physical aspects of it. I focus more so on the mental health aspects of it as well. I started to publish articles that I think worked for me just to share that knowledge of, you know, hey, this worked for me, maybe you want to give it a try. I'm fortunate to live in an area that's very wooded, with a lot of trails, that kind of deprograms me and kind of recharges, I like to just walk into nature and just kind of get that feeling there. Anything to kind of get out of the system, learn more about compartmentalization and trying to separate what you had at work and trying not to bring it home, trying not to bring an argument at home into work and vice versa, and how it can intermingle and then create more problems.

And then for many of us, myself included, you have to watch for excessive drinking. The bottle, unfortunately, is one of our outlets. It's obviously not an appropriate or a positive outlet, but it is an outlet. As the research has shown, we have high rates of alcohol, excessive alcohol usage, and problem drinking. We have high rates of divorce, we have high rates of being terminated. So it's just like we're elevated in all respects. So the culture itself is very toxic. And that's been my passion. And that leads into why I'm here.

My passion is trying to change the entire culture of corrections.

The first article came out in 2017. The frustration that I have, and that many shared in the first panel, is that we know all this. We've been talking about a lot of these things, but nothing has come to fruition. So, you know, I'll write an article, people in the room will read it. You know, other academics will read it, but the policymakers aren't reading them. The people that need to be reading this, the people that need to be interacting and consulting with us are not. And this is where we're having like this, this kind of blockade that needs to be overcome. So my goal is now trying to get out there and get this platform that I have. You know, as an educator, I'm thankful every single day because I have a platform to then basically express myself and kind of illuminate or highlight those deficiencies and weaknesses within the criminal justice system, including corrections without fear of repercussions, which is awesome. But if I were still in the corrections field, you're limited in what you could say because that could be held against you and that's the last thing you want.

So I try to highlight, not just for correctional officers, but for those that are incarcerated as well, highlight the weaknesses, deficiencies and areas that still need that attention.

My niche, though, has been focusing on the correctional officers. Now, as the young woman mentioned before our break, and I'm glad that you mentioned that this isn't just a focus on male correctional officers, but just correctional staff in general - men, women, those that work in custody, those that are programmatic staff, ancillary staff, all of those individuals make it up. And I had to learn that myself. In the first publication, I refer to correctional officers and refer to males, he, him and realized that I'm forgetting about females that work in the system as well, so addressing that entire group there.

Then of course, there are those that are drug and alcohol counselors, there are those that are teachers, recreational directors, all those that kind of still work within the corrections setting that are still impacted by what goes on in our nation's prisons.

So it's time for a change. And the reason I was so excited and passionate about coming here today is that I feel like we are making the change. This is the highlight. This right here is kind of like seven, eight years of work coming to fruition where people of different backgrounds are hearing our stories and trying and will hopefully bring this back to share with their network and then continue onward. We all have networks, in corrections or even in academia, you share among yourselves, so again, it's still limited. So I'm trying to expand out and this is where it helps us kind of lead out into that. So I'm hoping that we can continue this dialogue even after we leave here today and that we can share our contact information and hopefully kind of expand on a lot of these thoughts. It's become such an important area. It's funny because I wrote the article and didn't necessarily expect that it would take off like that and didn't expect that it would become anything more than just another article. But it led to the culmination of a book in which I now use in my classes to try to educate those who want to get into corrections.

So I'm thinking, okay, part of the problem is that if I can't address it necessarily on the back end, rather than just attacking the back end and trying to work with correctional officers in today's prisons that are dealing with this, which I think we're doing a cumulative, or collectively, we're doing a great job. But I wanted to kind of get at it from the front end. And as an educator, I have the advantage of working with individuals and preparing them for entry into the criminal justice system, particularly into corrections. What to expect. And I don't sugarcoat it like I had it explained to me when I was a student. Oftentimes, you know, you have this glimpse when you're a criminal justice student that everything is car chases and gun battles and all this excitement like superhero stuff. And then the reality of it is, whoa, okay, it's much more different than that. So, if I prepare them, for the good and the bad. And it took a little while for the administration to get on board with that, too. But I think it's a realistic approach. Yes, it's stressful. Yes, there's going to be challenges that you're going to face, physical and mental health challenges. But, this is how you can either prevent them or minimize them from occurring. And if they do start occurring, this is what you can do to try to get yourself some help. That is my main goal, is to prevent the loss of life for those that I have worked with, those that I continue to work with as students who become professionals.

Because, again, this isn't just a corrections problem. This is in criminal justice in general. At the end of this month or next month, I'll be talking to probation officers in Pennsylvania, addressing their needs. So it kind of overlaps. So trying to get students to prepare.

The other part of it is that corrections was, and may still be, a stepping stone to other careers. People use it just to kind of move into something else. Trying to stop that from occurring. Trying to make this the actual profession that it is and deserves to be. And the recognition that it has. And for the men and women who do work in this profession to be recognized for their efforts. So in order to do so, you have to make it more attractive. You have to present it as a more lucrative type of profession to be involved in. I think for a lot of us in the room, you get into corrections and then you stay when you realize that the stability of the job, the security of the job, the nice pay that comes along with it, the nice benefits, the early retirement, and that's important. I understand that. But as we've mentioned several times over, the high or the low life expectancy is a huge concern of ours. And it should be. And sadly, as I've crept up the ladder with the fifties, I've encountered individuals who I've worked with who didn't necessarily also die by suicide, but simply died of natural causes caused by some type of physical illness. And as you know, COVID just expanded on that and created a huge, huge problem for officers. One of my former students, 30 years old, physically fit, two young kids, died by COVID. So it's just a huge impact. Trying to move this profession forward is a combined effort. And so each year I meet more and more people, from different sections of the United States, Norway, and have that ability then to kind of take this profession forward. My goal, as I continue, though, is to work with others to try to focus on the stress management, try to focus on stress reduction and try to educate officers that are current officers as well as future to be aware of what they're going to possibly encounter and how to counteract that. To do so, I went to be a suicide prevention facilitator over the quarantine. Kind of get some extra credentials in there so I can then address it with first responders. So one of my goals in the very near future is to go into the Department of Corrections and start doing trainings, for free, because I know that budgets always come up, so it's a freebie. Go in there and start talking about it, but give a realistic glimpse of, okay, this is probably what you're encountering right now or may be encountering and this is what you can expect to deal with. So that is my goal, is to try to expand this and to try to continue working with others. I think collectively we have a bigger voice than just one or two individuals.



TESTIFIER #2
TOR ERIK LARSEN

Finding a better way forward – What needs to change? What do you want change? How do you change?

First of all, my background as a corrections officer in Norway, then a union rep and now a union leader, does not make me an expert on change, but it has given me a unique opportunity to be involved in many different change processes, both on the individual and organizational levels. All my years of service have been either as a part of the rank and file or as a union rep, and it is in that capacity that I have been directly involved in so many processes of change. I haven't always loved the process. It hasn't always worked perfectly.

But, change is the one thing that we can count on. How we relate to it is what will define us as leaders.

Let me take a step back and tell you a bit about Norway, the country I come from, and about the Nordic model. It may sound to some like I come from a different planet but believe me its just a quick plane flight away. Workers in Norway have a constitutional right to influence their own workplace. There is even a special law (the work environment act) to secure workers' safety and their right to be part of the decision making through union representation. There is a written agreement, called the Basic Agreement, between the workers' (union) and the government that states how the unions and the employers have to work together to create the best result. And in public service the best result will always be to deliver the best possible service as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible.

I am not here to tell you that the U.S. should copy the Norwegian/Nordic model, but it has some valid points that I have seen firsthand can improve almost any private business or public service sector anywhere in the world. First and foremost, there is a fundamental link between employer and worker, through the unions.

The Basic agreement is a tool to prevent wasteful conflict between workers and employers; it doesn't eliminate tension but it does reduce waste and distraction.

The Nordic model has many important points, but the most important thing to understand is the essential purpose of the agreement: Through the model both employer and the unions have entered into the agreement with the purpose of creating the best possible basis for cooperation.

Along with the work environment act, this agreement is the basis for worker influence on our own workplaces. It's meant to ensure the workers have actual influence on our own workplace, how work is organized and how the method and approach to the work is developed. The agreement is to be used as a tool to develop leadership, workers' influence and the work environment.

The model gives every worker the possibility for both professional and personal growth.

The opportunity to develop mutual cooperation so that it can contribute to a flexible and user friendly service, with a good work environment, good leadership, better results and good relations with society (users).

To achieve this, unions and employers regularly meet to focus on three topics: Information – there is an obligation for the employer to inform the unions of anything that will influence the workers, and the obligation is mutual. The unions also have to inform the employer of their activity that could or would influence the employer. Any issue that could end up as a discussion, or as a negotiation, has to be disclosed here, before it can be discussed or negotiated.

Discussion – there is a long list of activities that the employer has to discuss with the unions before he or she can make a decision. In fact, there is also a possibility for the unions to demand a discussion before the employer makes a decision. Budget, building projects, business plans, training etc are all examples of matters that have to be discussed before a decision is made. The list goes on, but because discussions can be demanded, by the union, it is not a complete list. It's not necessary to reach an agreement in each case, but it is important that the union's voice is heard.

It's also a great opportunity for the employer to troubleshoot his or her own ideas.

Negotiations – Unlike discussions, the list for negotiations is exhaustive, and all elements that can be negotiated have to be within the employers area of authority, within the approved budget and be in line with the instructions and the political priorities that have been determined for the business. A change in the organizational chart or an increase in staffing are examples of cases that have to be negotiated.

This is a very rough summary of the agreement. And, I haven't said anything about what happens if the employer and unions can't agree or what if one of the parties breaches the basic agreement. And I could say a lot. But, for today, the point of the agreement is to further cooperation between unions and employers and to make sure that we provide the best service possible, create the best outcomes and do it efficiently.

Before I came to the U.S. to testify at this commission, I had a talk with the assistant director of corrections in Norway, I told him that I was coming here to talk about the basic agreement as an instrument for making a better way forward and that I wondered what he would say if he was here...With his first instinct he said, "I am all for it." After a while he said, "I don't think that involving the unions in the decision making makes it flawless, but it certainly gives me a better basis for making better decisions. And the fact that the unions sign off on a decision, gives it more legitimacy with the workers. The bigger the decision, the more important it is to have talked it through with the unions before the decision is made."

So what, if anything, does this have to do with change and finding a better way forward? Well, whether you want to improve staff health and wellness, inmate conditions or the financial structure and cost of corrections, you have to ask the question: what led to this? Why are we here? And, are we satisfied with the way things are currently?

In the 1950's these questions were asked in Norway, and that's what has led us to where we are today, a total rehabilitation of how we thought of corrections. To improve staff health and wellness we realized that we also have to improve living conditions in prison and we had to look at the financial cost in a different way (investing versus saving). The commission that asked these questions in Norway understood that to improve the impact prisons have on everyone they touch the government had to actually invest more

money directly into corrections, but in the long term the savings would make the total cost of corrections lower. With more money, the staff in corrections could get better training, have better staffing plans and ratios, and work with more rehabilitative measures and prepare the inmates for meeting life on the outside in a much better way. Increased staffing gives you better work hours, better possibilities for training and continuing education, better possibilities to positively influence the inmates and get to know them as people and not just inmates. But all that costs more. All that requires treating the people who work in the prisons as the true professionals we are.

Crucial to succeed in this model is the focus on dynamic security. At its core it made the staff feel more secure at work. Next to dynamic security, we use the term static and organizational security.

The dynamic security complements static elements (walls and fences around the prison, cameras and more) and the organizational measures (overlap between shifts, time for training staff/inmate ratio, work hours etc), and consists of dialogue between officer and inmate. The general idea is that if the officer knows the inmate, it's easier to influence the inmate. And if the inmate trusts the officer it's less likely that he/she will attack the officer and more likely that the officer can influence the inmate in his or her decision making. The important thing to remember is that to implement dynamic security, you need both static and organizational security, if they are not there it will be impossible to create a safe frame for dynamic work.

In Norway, we come from a history of thinking that incarceration should be a time for solitary penance and prayer, and many citizens still think it should be that way. Today we have evolved from that and we use the principle of normality, which is basically just to try and make life on the inside as similar to life on the outside as possible. We believe that the deprivation of liberty is the punishment and nothing more. We try to use the time an inmate is incarcerated to make a positive change, so that they are better equipped to live a life without crime when they are released. It has been a long journey from the 1950s and up to today's correctional principles. One of the main reasons we have been able to make this change is the Basic Agreement and the fact that employers and unions have to cooperate in the decision making. This effort to change has also changed the nature of the job for those of us working in corrections. First our training academy: in the past 70 years we have gone from on-the-job-training to a two year paid academy training. The academy in Norway combines academics with practical training and it has one year of mandatory service after you graduate.

The ratio of those who are incarcerated to officers differs, but the staffing ratio is 1 staff to every inmate.

Small but important things like the “overlap” between when officers leave from one shift and arrive for the next shift, are a part of the organizational security. This is important so the officers can discuss follow up on certain inmates and do a general run up of the day. Information is important and saves lives.

We have not reached our goals yet and corrections in Norway is anything but flawless. But we have made progress. We still have work to do on stress, PTSD and wellness. We have learned a lot from our brothers and sisters here about this issue and our work isn’t done. But the expectations and conditions of incarceration have changed and we are safer and more satisfied as a result.

It takes time to reform anything but especially, corrections, because you are not just reforming a sector of public service, you are changing parts of a cultural identity in a nation. To do that, it’s important to have as many allies as possible when you start.

This has not been an easy reform, and I don’t think it would have been possible without the cooperation between the employer side and the unions to think outside of the box, to imagine a different way of doing things and to insure that those of us who work on the frontlines everyday have our interests and voices recognized and so that the new system works for us and for everyone it touches.

That cooperation is based on the Basic Agreement as a tool for building cooperation and to facilitate change. It is based on respecting correctional staff and about a national culture that decided more than 50 years ago to do something different.

So in closing, when you hear about the Norway model for corrections, remember what made that a success is the Norway model of co-responsibility and cooperation between unions and employers.

Thank you.



TESTIFIER #3
CATERINA SPINARIS

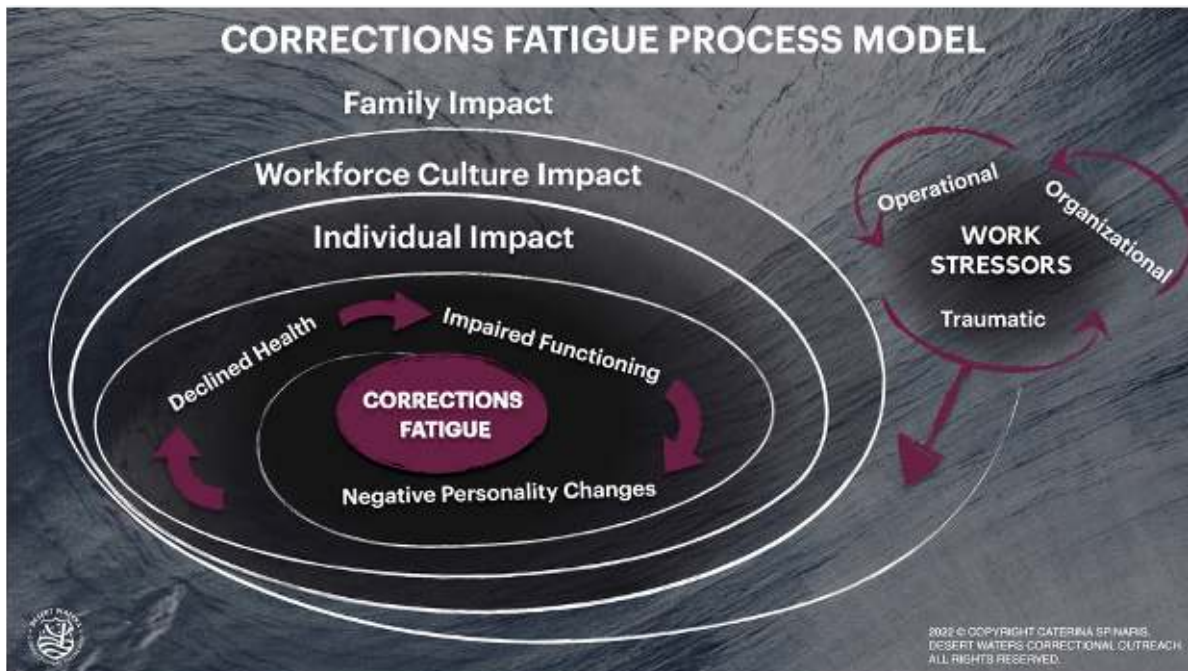
Good morning. I thank you for taking time from your precious day to be here with us today. My background is psychotherapy, and I'm a research psychologist as well. And so I'll come from a perspective of a clinician and a researcher, and also as a human being, talking about human beings I love, correctional staff and their family members.

My journey into the arena of corrections staff wellness started very unexpectedly and not by my design. This is how it happened: I moved from one part of Colorado to a rural area that was saturated with prisons. Altogether, three adjacent counties had 17 prisons and the corresponding county jails. So as I set up a little part-time private practice there—I thought I was there to semi-retire, grow garlic and raise goats. Instead, I ended up having correctional staff showing up on my doorstep for “shrink” work, psychotherapy--correctional staff, their families, exes, retirees. And that's when I started getting my education about what corrections work can do to a human being. And I used to tell my clients, “You have an invisible tattoo on your forehead that says PTSD.” And they'd say, “Oh, that's corrections for you. No big deal.” But it was and is a big deal. That's when the call came into my life to do something about it and step up, which was not what I wanted. It was not what I had any desire to do. But the call was relentless. So here we are 20 some years later. We founded Desert Waters Correctional Outreach as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, with the aim being the health, sanity, well-being of correctional staff of all disciplines and job descriptions, their family members, and the agencies where they work, because it's really very hard to be a healthy fish in an unhealthy, polluted pond.

The corrections environment is not just unhealthy for the incarcerated, is also unhealthy for the staff, as they're all swimming in the same pool.

So we set up Desert Waters Correctional Outreach to be like water in the desert, because at the time it was like a desert in terms of lack of support and resources for the staff and their families. And we promptly found out that we were not welcome, because, on the one hand, line staff thought we were spies for administration to find out who was disgruntled and turn them in. And so they responded to us with, “Stay away from us!” And administrators in some places thought that we were a danger to them because we would cause them lawsuits for PTSD or would empower the unions to ask for more privileges, and so they did not want to explore what we were bringing to the table, and they did not want their staff to approach us. So both parties said, “Go away, little woman, what are you doing here? Who are you? What do you know about corrections? Who are you to tell us what staff need?” And of course, I know nothing about corrections other than what I learned from the people that I talk to. My whole experience and knowledge foundation has been based on listening to staff and their families for 22 years, and also on doing the research and listening to the data and to the comments people make when asked.

For this hearing I put together a handout with three graphics. The first graphic is designed to take you on a little journey that describes what can happen over time in the life of a Corrections Officer or other corrections worker. We call it the Corrections Fatigue Process Model. Let’s start with that.



I originated the term Corrections Fatigue back in the year 2000, when I was trying to appease my conscience about not wanting to get involved in corrections, in spite of the strong feeling I felt to do so. At the time I thought, okay, I'll develop some material for the profession, and then walk away and go about my life.

So what is Corrections Fatigue? When I tried to label what I was observing in corrections staff, the word burnout did not fit. Burnout addresses the effects of organizational and operational stressors. Operational stressors in corrections include running 24/7 operations, shift work, mandatory overtime, high workload, equipment issues, plant issues, temperature, locks - whether they're working or not, overcrowding, noise, lack of cleanliness, those kinds of things - technical aspects of the job. Organizational stressors are the interpersonal, "people" aspects of the job, like friction, clashes, leadership styles, how promotions get done, how investigations get done, how evaluations get done, how discipline gets done. The concept of burnout, which addresses the impact of operational and organizational stressors, is missing the aspect of trauma in corrections. Corrections work is saturated with exposure to traumatic material. This can be directly, in your face, when you witness it with your own eyes or hear it with your own ears, in real time, like when you see somebody else getting affected, whether an incarcerated person or a coworker is being attacked or is dying of natural causes in front of you, whatever it might be. Or when you get assaulted yourself. Or you are exposed to traumatic material indirectly, when you learn about it, like when you hear about it later on, watch the video, read the memo, read the files. Corrections staff are saturated with incredible numbers of exposure to trauma directly and indirectly. The term burnout did not capture that, and that is why I originated the term Corrections Fatigue to capture and describe the cumulative effect of all those exposures - operational, organization and traumatic - like one big pot of stew, where everything gets mixed up together and different ingredients affect one another, changing the flavor of one another. For example, different stressors can make each other worse, like short-staffing (an operational stressor) will lead to an increased overall risk of an assault happening, which would lead to, of course, trauma, and then it would lead to the organizational stressors of staff arguing and blaming each other or their administration, or hating whoever attacked them. And then people call off sick because they don't want to go back into that environment or they're mad at somebody. So short-staffing gets worse, and the cycle keeps going on, and all in the system get impacted.

Corrections Fatigue starts by feeding into this hurricane or toilet bowl that you see in the graphic, however you want to label it, affecting staff at the individual level. And individual staff start to change. Earlier today there was a lot of talk about staff changing for the worse, so how do they change? We'll start with the negative personality changes. For example, somebody who was gregarious, trusting, friendly, warm and cuddly becomes like a wounded grizzly, a prickly cactus. They become short, irritable, impatient, possibly hostile, rude, mistrusting, reclusive, unfriendly. People become difficult to get along with, and their health starts declining. For one thing, being angry a lot affects our health negatively. So physical health, psychological health, and spiritual health start to decline, and continue to decline unless effective interventions are put in place and people practice effective coping skills. People who used to be fine and healthy before they started working in corrections develop all kinds of physical ailments like headaches, backaches, weight gain, sleep disturbances, high blood pressure. They start taking blood pressure meds in their twenties. They become anxious and depressed. Panic attacks are setting in. Then we have the post-traumatic symptoms, of course, piling up over time on top of the depression, and substance misuse becomes a common way to cope. Spiritually, people become hopeless, negative, cynical, alienated and disconnected from key relationships in their families and in their communities, or from their faith. And of course, all that affects functioning. How could it not? So people don't operate well in their community, in their homes. They don't nurture key relationships. They don't keep up with their responsibilities. They don't keep up with taking care of their dependents. They don't enjoy anymore what they used to enjoy. And at work, they start cutting corners, they may start treating others - other staff or the incarcerated - poorly. It's like they don't have brakes on their anger. Their brakes fail and they may "lose" it with people at work and at home. And as enough people in the workplace have those issues happening, these behaviors become the norm. The environment, the culture, becomes permeated with Corrections Fatigue. It's like a contagious virus that spreads. The whole workforce culture, the whole workplace, starts reeking of that same stench, and starts looking and acting "fatigued." And when new hires walk in the door, full of enthusiasm and vigor, they get hit with that negativity, that hopelessness, that darkness, that callousness, that impatience, that attitude of, "I'm not going to talk to you for a year till you prove yourself to me, that you're going to stay." And on and on it goes. And the symptoms end up becoming causes when they impact other people. And the whole thing continues to snowball.

Of course, Corrections Fatigue affects the people staff manage and supervise. And of course, it goes home because it is the same brain that is at work and the same brain that goes home. When they go home, staff don't switch their brains off. So the same things affect family, and family becomes the collateral damage. They never signed up for the job, but in essence they did, they just didn't know it. So the effects of Corrections Fatigue keep spreading and snowballing.

What can do we do to address this? We need to start with research-based education.

And I'm really thankful to Stephen Walker for bringing that up. This needs to be our focus to begin with, research-based education, because I believe information is power, and people need to understand what's going on within them and with other staff around them. They need to have a roadmap about what's happened to them, to grasp how they've changed, why they've changed, instead of "beating themselves up," feeling ashamed or hating who they have become. With such a roadmap they can understand what happened to them, without shame or self-hate. Like, "Oh, that's how I ended up there. It's no wonder I'm acting the way I do! What can I do to get out of this spiral?"

So, let's go now to the third graphic, My Three Wishes. These are my top three things that I'd like to see put in place regarding corrections staff wellness.



Before I start describing them, I'd like to say that I've seen a tremendous improvement in the area of corrections staff wellness since 2003 when Desert Waters was founded. Today it's like night and day, in terms of the corrections profession opening up and accepting that staff wellness gets impaired due to occupational stressors. This Blue Ribbon Commission is an example of how far we've come. But we have a long way to go still. A long way. To address these issues, we at Desert Waters conducted and continue to conduct research on the subject, and developing training courses based on the findings. We're doing a tremendous number of training of instructors in our courses, who get certified to teach their peers at work. One of our courses, that won an award, is the course "From Corrections Fatigue to Fulfillment." We have versions of that course for new hires, for seasoned staff, for parole and probation, for juvenile detention staff, and juvenile community staff, and for administrators. We also address issues of administrators because they get forgotten in the mix, and they are affected too. So there's much, much more of an openness now, and yet there's still such a huge need. And 8 hours of wellness training, if you can get them 8 hours a year, are like a minuscule drop in a huge bucket. You need things that are much more ongoing, much more entrenched, much more part and parcel of how we do corrections.

So here are my three wishes, and if we have time, we'll go over the second graphic later. First of all, for corrections staff wellness, we have to factor in the effects of constant, continual, ongoing, chronic exposure to danger and other types of high stress events, and how these affect the brain, how they literally wire our brain at levels that we cannot control voluntarily. People who feel under threat a lot - and we talk a lot about hypervigilance in corrections, as the staff are continually on the lookout for danger - people under such circumstances are in a fight and flight mode way too much. And as corrections philosophies and practices change, for good reason, and we are emphasizing rehabilitation more and the fact that we're all human, that everybody involved in the system is human, we have to factor in that people who are chronically in danger are wired to either run in the opposite direction or attack and suppress the danger, to stop the danger from hurting them. This is a very big stressor for staff, especially when they're chronically partially sleep deprived. They're already impaired at that level because they're not doing mandatory overtime just a week here and a week there. We're talking about months and years of doing doubles. Three or four days a week, barely getting 4 hours of sleep daily. So we have people with their batteries already running low on juice, extremely low. And then we put them in very high demand environments where they have to be on their toes and respond and have good self-control.

Well, we have to factor in how the brain has been wired to be reactive to either squelch danger or get away from it. And this has to be taken into account, including it as a reality that may influence the uses of force, may influence how people interact with each other, may influence how even supervisors address their subordinates.

Then the next big thing. From everything I hear (because, remember, I never worked a day in corrections in my life), from what I hear from staff from all over the country, is that as the pendulum has swung towards more acknowledgment and understanding of the needs and rights of people who are incarcerated, staff safety may have taken a back seat. We need to also keep into account the needs and rights for safety of staff, because we forget that if staff are not safe and feel safe and feel taken care of, they are not going to be delivering what you want them to deliver. There is no way, no way, that the mission of an agency for rehabilitation will be accomplished with impaired, broken down, exhausted, freaked out, paranoid, reactive staff. I mean, if you have somebody who is ready to pounce on you in self-defense at the drop of a hat because they feel threatened all the time, they're not going to stop and be empathetic and a good listener with the incarcerated. Their brain is in survival mode. So we have to take that into account. They're put in an impossible position to be self-controlled, mature, professional when they are crumbling on the inside and when they feel very, very unsafe. And they feel thrown under the proverbial bus. We're kidding ourselves if we think that we're going to have good rehabilitation. Staff that feel unsafe are going to check the box, pay lip service to rehabilitation approaches, but the real thing is not going to really happen. We need to have healthy staff. The biggest investment an agency can do or anybody who cares about the rights of the incarcerated - the biggest thing they could do in my book is do everything they can do to keep the staff safe and healthy. Because if you have healthy staff, it's like you have tools in good condition. A carpenter, a machinist, a mechanic - what do they want? They want good tools. How can a carpenter build kitchen cabinets with broken down tools, tools that are chipped, broken, cracked, not oiled, whatever? They cannot build a good cabinet for you unless they have good tools. The staff are the tools through which the job gets done. So even if people don't like corrections officers, even if people don't value them, even if people don't want them around, the smartest thing to do would be to have them be healthy, because then they can deliver what you want them to be delivering. So even if you don't like them, please take care of them. You need them and they deserve it. Taking care of staff is the smart thing to do. It's a smart investment.

The other thing is that, of course, taking care of staff is the moral thing to do, the ethical thing to do.

If you send somebody to a toxic spill in their little sandals and shorts, that's not right. They need a hazmat suit. Staff are being thrown in the middle of all kinds of traumatic and other high-stress situations with no protection, no coping tools.

The message they are given, essentially, is, "Deal with it, another day in paradise, and come back tomorrow and do it all over again. And don't complain about being put in the same unit where the floor was covered in blood, and you're having nightmares about it. Sorry, you're going to have to go back there and work there. And it's not my problem. You signed up for this, and they hire at Wal-Mart." And so that's how they are treated, and that's how they're being talked to. And that bothers me, a lot, because that's not right. We're throwing staff in the middle of the toxic spill, and not giving them hazmat suits, and we need to change that. We need to provide them with hazmat suits. Because, once again, how can they take care of things if they are not in shape to do so? And it's the ethical thing to do to take care of our workers.

So what else do we need? We need staff wellness programs that are not a check the box type of program. It's not about having somebody with 13 tasks and then you tell them that now their 14th task is going to be staff wellness. We need to have dedicated positions created for staff wellness. That this will be their full-time job, and that they will have policies and procedures backing them up. That they will have budget line items backing them up. That funding is not going to go away, that it will not be the flavor of the month approach that will go away with the next administration, the next governor, the next warden. Staff need to know that their wellness program is going to be here no matter what. And that is because you cannot run facilities with broken down tools. You have to keep your tools in shape.

That's why we need things like preventative measures. And again, thanks, Stephen Walker, for bringing up the importance of preventative training. It's so much easier to take care of things in advance than fix something that broke. Trying to do things preventatively, equipping in advance, that's one of the things we at Desert Waters are doing with both staff and families, making them aware of what's coming down the pike, what to expect, how to read the roadmap that they're on, and then having also processing capabilities, knowing what they can do to manage situations, and offering them resources that are corrections-specific. For example, it's critical that corrections systems have EAP services where therapists understand corrections folks and their workplace culture. When I was still offering therapy services I've had staff tell me, "You're the fourth therapist I tried, and I'm amazed I even still tried. I was about to give up."

Everybody else could not understand the context of where I'm coming from. They thought I was just a mean spouse, when they didn't understand why I would come home in a rage." That is why we need corrections-specific, educated therapists and wellness literature that addresses their issues.

And since we have enough time, let us look at the second graphic, which presents Three Target Areas all of which are essential and must be engaged if corrections staff wellness programming is to succeed.



There is no magic bullet. I don't believe in magic bullets. That's all fantasy. We need EVERYBODY in the system to do their part. And I'm talking now about the professionals, not the incarcerated. Top down, decisions makers, like administrators, supervisors and union leaders must do their part; horizontally, coworkers/peers must do their part as to how they treat one another, to create healthy workforce cultures; and bottom up, individual staff must do their part, implementing what they are taught at work about self-care. I'm talking about the fact that administrators need to set up whatever policies, procedures, budget line items are needed for staff wellness, and be held accountable for following through, and not have staff wellness be swept under the rug and go away because of other stressors. Peers need to do their part, how they treat each other. A lot of times staff tell me, "My problem is not the incarcerated; my problem is other staff."

So it's about how staff treat each other, and not abuse and beat on each other. And then each individual staff member needs to do their part. If you are trained in wellness and resilience, and you are given tools, put them to practice. I don't care if you only practice one of them. Start doing something to help yourself. So we need everybody to do their part for us to move forward. Otherwise it's going to be jerky little movements here and there, and the flavor of the month kind of approach. And then we're going to stay in the misery of Corrections Fatigue. Way too many corrections people die every day, as you said, and have lousy life experiences.

Thank you very much.

COMMISSIONER RESPONSES TO PANEL 2:



**COMMISSIONER
JULIENE JAMES**

Thank you all so much for the work you do. You've really dedicated your lives to this, and I appreciate it so much. We've had a lot of wonderful imagery today that I think helps those of us who haven't carried the keys understand a little bit of what you're going through. I just keep coming back to this - the rain that is falling on all of us, the secondhand smoke, the toxic plant. And I am angry on your behalf because this isn't a problem that you should have to treat. It's not even a problem that you should try to prevent. Why do we have the system that we have? And I'm angry because of the decisions that were made, over decades of policy decisions, that led to this mass incarceration problem that we have, this under-investment in the treatment and the workforce. You know, retention, yes, that's a problem. Underpayment in many places is a problem. And it's because it's too much. It's too big. And we are, I think, overdue for a reckoning for that. So I'm carrying that. But what I want to focus on is something that I've heard as a little bit of a theme. I think you have power in your stories, so thank you for your vulnerability and sharing that. You have power when you're together. And so we've heard a lot about the power of collective action and unions. I am glad that at Arnold Ventures we're able to support some innovative approaches to conditions, and there are a lot of folks in this room who have worked on those things. So there is light, you know, there is possibility. But I think we have to look at the bigger picture. This triangle is so helpful for the system. But, who's influencing what that system looks like, what the pond is? And its policymakers. And, you know, some of the work that we do is around advocacy as well. It's not just looking at what's happening inside prisons, but who's making the decisions about that? And so my question to you all, and really to any of the panelists today, I don't know if I'm allowed to do that, but it's to say,

**What do you want policymakers to know about your work, what do you want them to do?
Because they have the power and they're not listening...**

they're not looking. So what is it going to take? You're going to have to speak together and loudly with one voice. What do you want them to hear?

TESTIFIER RESPONSE TO COMMISSIONER JULIENE JAMES

Caterina Spinaris:

I would love for people to hear from the officers about what they need to be safe in their workplace. Whether it will be the staffing issues or some policies and procedures, because until they are feeling physically safe, all the other stuff is fluff to them and goes out the window.



**COMMISSIONER
DAVID PITTS**

I really appreciate all of you offering your insights today and to all of you I appreciate the work that you do in your day to day careers. I actually want to touch on something that I think is really important and that I hear throughout everything you've said today, which is that we are in the midst of a full on staffing crisis in corrections today. There are not nearly enough people in the workforce to even start to create an environment where people can be healthy. And so we've heard that in Mrs. Brown's testimony that was read earlier that talked about the mandatory overtime. Not only does that create issues with sleep, you're missing children's events the next day, you're making sacrifices on behalf of your family that your family didn't sign up for. And it really creates, I think, a rippling effect that continues after that. I talk to wardens in my day to day work who operate facilities on about 60% of the staffing level they're designed to have. That means that they are using mandatory overtime extensively over the course of their week. And I also talk to wardens that in labor planning have shifts where even if they held over every single person from this shift before, would not have enough people to cover the prison at a minimal level with everyone on lockdown. When everyone's on lockdown, it's not the COs or the incarcerated people that suffer alone. Everybody suffers. No one wants to have that happen. And so what can the wardens actually do? I hear from them that they are lowering the age from 21 to 18, so when you're 18, you can join corrections. Now they're offering thousand dollar starting bonuses, which is a pittance, you know, for what they're trying to get done. And they're trying to shorten academies in an

effort to get bodies into facilities faster. And that goes certainly against everything that we've talked about today with the training. What the wardens can't do is work with pay, most of the time. If I, for example, operated a factory and I couldn't get enough workers to make my product, what would I do? I would increase the cost of the product and pay better wages. But we have legislatures that are involved in setting budgets and legislatures historically have not liked to give money to corrections organizations because it's not always the politically popular thing to do. And so I mentioned all of this to follow Julie's comments about the decades of policy decisions that have gotten us where we are to say that for those of us who work in policy, counting me, I think it is on us to say to policymakers that investment in the professional careers associated with this line of policy is crucial.

People are dying because this is not being compensated properly.

And I think until we start to do that, you can't have people who've worked 85 hours be excited about an eight hour wellness training day. That's the last thing that they want to do on their week, on their day off, if they have one. And so I don't have a question for folks so much as just to ask that all of us consider how we can play into, I guess, the advocacy necessary to get resource levels where they need to be so that people who work in prisons are compensated as the professionals they are. And even though we may not get to those ratios that you mentioned earlier or, you know, get to a two year academy, I think we have a lot of progress that we can make in getting closer to that. So thank you all again for what you do. And I appreciate being here today.



**COMMISSIONER
BRIANNA NUHFER**

Thank you so much. I have learned a lot today. I'm honored to be able to join and listen to each of you as you share your heart, your stories, your experience and your research. So thank you. Kind of building on this theme of the challenge of the staffing crisis, I wanted to circle back to a question around recruitment. I think it was Mr. Young that said something really insightful to me, which is that we as a society have changed our expectations of our criminal justice systems away from purely a focus on punishment and incapacitation to one that rehabilitates. And yet,

we're still training and bringing in corrections officers and professionals under the incapacitation mindset of decades ago.

And we don't have the support systems around them, the training to fulfill the new mission of corrections that society is demanding, one of rehabilitation, one of a shared sense of humanity. So I'm curious, from a recruitment perspective, I had the opportunity to spend some time with former director of Corrections LeAnn Burch in North Dakota, and she showed how they were revamping all of their materials. They're rethinking what even the profile of an effective corrections professional looks like. And so, Mr. Larson, perhaps if you could start by commenting on how you guys are thinking about that in Norway in terms of where you go to find good talent and how are you describing the job? Obviously, it needs to match reality, and so I understand there are some challenges there from a funding perspective and lots of work to be done in policy change, but how are you thinking creatively about tomorrow's workforce as it relates to the corrections space? And maybe what can we learn from your experience?

TESTIFIER RESPONSE TO COMMISSIONER BRIANA NUHFER

Tor Erik Larsen:

I'll try and answer that question. What we did, I think probably 60 years ago, is that we stopped on the job training and we went for a more theoretical and academic training academy. We taught our new officers about these people that are in prisons, what type of people they are. We gave them tools for how to approach them and talk to them. We also spent a lot of time on preparing the future officers on what they will meet when they go out there. Because one of the years at the Academy is out and doing service in a prison with a mentor. So you're kind of eased into the profession, and in the recruitment, as you now do it as part of a degree. So once you've finished the Academy and worked for a year or two, then you can apply to take the bachelor's degree. I'm not sure if that's the best way to go because it's in, in its heart, it's kind of a practical job. But you can, if you use the time properly, you can prepare the future officers for what they're going to do. Like I heard a lot of people talking about here today, they lacked the preparation for what they were signing up for. So you could do that, but it won't fix everything and cause you have to continue education all the way. Also because you're not final, you're not finished with your education when you finish the academy, that's part of your education starts when you finish the academy and you have to revamp it.



**COMMISSIONER
JUAN GOMEZ**

I want to thank everyone here, especially for your service, those from the military and those that had to serve behind those walls as a result of that war on drugs, the war on gangs. I was locked up, I remember Ralph Anderson, he ended up moving to Idaho. He said, you know, the population is changing, so I'm going to get out of here before it gets worse, because whatever happened in the eighties, they're starting to talk to us about what's going to happen when you have the children of those who have been addicted to drugs, especially crack and the mental health conditions we're not being prepared for, and they're not gonna bring us better training. So I say that because one of the biggest, I think someone mentioned cognitive dissonance, and what I'm hearing is that there's deep seated harm, hurt, loss, grief and there has never been a time to be able to mourn about some of this stuff - we just go back at it. And the trauma and the drama didn't start when you started the

first day there. Many of you, many of us, we bring it there and that comes home. I had to go to South Carolina a few years ago after one of the worst prison riots since Attica. Seven men lay dead, many more terrorized, traumatized. They brought that home and they had to get stuck with it. You know, there ain't nobody coming in there. So they said, Hey, can you all come in here and help support? Because I hear about the support that is physical and mental. But you cannot forget the relational, the emotional and the spiritual, which we alluded to. You know, for instance, we come here, right, and we are on indigenous land here. We ought to honor our elders, our ancestors, the Piscataway, the Algonquin peoples people, right. Like, I see that flag. And it's really a powerful symbol because I see that eagle. I see this one right here, it's a really important bird for us. The highest regard you can get. You get honored. We get decorated, too, you know. So I want to take the time to honor all of you in a good way, in our indigenous way, because we have to think something different. This is a baby bald eagle. It was given to me in Arizona by the White Mountain Apaches. They had to have a fight with the military there just so they can maintain their land. So I'm going to take the time to step right there and sing a song that came to me. I was in Germany, they took us to an internment camp and the song came to me right there, it's talking about how we got to call upon our Mother Earth to help heal us, to help, because you need it. In some of these places, I was working in Rikers Island from last July all the way to December and I'll tell you, you don't want to be incarcerated there. You don't want to work there. It's crazy. It's off the hook. So before they get to prison, they're in jail and it's off the hook over there. So, like I said, just a moment of silence and think about, you know, all those that came before you, think about your families, think about all of that. I'm gonna ask you all to stand starting with facing the east, and I'm gonna sing the song, and at the end, I'm going to blow the whistle ...non-transcribable serenade and whistle blowing... Thank you for all the work, for all the hardships. You know, I think about, you know, the women behind those walls who are also serving their time or working there. Because I've also had to go into those walls and if you see it say something, the sexual harassment is very pervasive. So, if you're working there, don't ever forget that those things need to also be addressed because it's one of the most toxic places for a lot of women and young men to be exposed to. Thank you so much. And like I said, I say that much, in the best way. You know, they could say, they are the glory. You know, they are the powerful. You know, they are the ancestors.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER CLOSING ROUND OF COMMENTS



**COMMISSIONER
ROB ENGLISH**

Thank you very much for that ritual and that honoring. Sitting here, and I've organized for over 25 years and communities across the country, Baltimore, Cleveland. And, what came to me, even though I've never carried the keys, is the stories here brought me back to before I was an organizer, I served in the military. And the idea of being behind walls, and feeling that you become a monster. That was lifted up by Mr. Walker and Mr. Young, and the toll that has on your soul. I can relate to that. At the same time, I had a conversation with a returning citizen just last week, and he said the same thing, and he actually used that word monster. And the effect that has on us. And then I think about today with Ms. Mellen and Ms. Kennedy - two daughters, one from an incarcerated family and one from a correctional officer with huge loss. And as I think about that, and honor that moment, my question for all of us, maybe for the panel, maybe Mr. Larsen from your experience from being afar, is, what would it mean for us to have returning citizens' families, returning citizens, correctional staff and officers united in this moment? Because this is a moment, as Simon says, that

we're so polarized and at the same time on criminal justice, it's one issue that Republicans and Democrats, independents can come together.

So, Mr. Larsen, I don't know if you have some insight into bringing together unusual allies in this fight?

TESTIFIER RESPONSE TO COMMISSIONER ROB ENGLISH

Tor Erik Larsen:

I'm not sure how to answer that actually because the Norwegian society is quite different than the U.S. society. There's something in our cultural identity that says that everybody needs a new chance. So I think it's easier to make a transition like that in Norway because you're always faced with the question - If you take a look at yourself in the mirror and think about your absolute lowest point, where you were at your worst - would you like that moment to define the rest of your life? I'm betting that none of the men and women that are incarcerated in the U.S. would like to be defined by their worst actions. I think that's probably just like a baseline in Norway for us.



**COMMISSIONER
DAVID SAFAVIAN**

Thank you. So for those of you I don't know, aside from being a lawyer, I'm a former police officer and I'm also formerly incarcerated. After listening today, I kind of have come away with three things. First is I'm reminded today that the job the correction officers do is one part law enforcement officer, one part social worker, one part counselor and mediator, one part mentor and really fundamentally restorer. And you know, you all know, we all hear about the thin blue line, but you guys are really on the thin blue line. Because you have this charge of safeguarding, safeguarding communities, safeguarding the people you're charged with overseeing, and safeguarding each other. But the mission there, on the public safety side, should be equally focused on rehabilitation and reentry, and hopefully redemption because those parts make every neighborhood safer. Really what kind of bottom line that I'm walking away from is, the profound policy parallels, ironically, between the life and job of a corrections officer, and those that you're charged to oversee. The mental health, the intergenerational cycle of trauma. And I think at the end of the day, the challenges you all have are linked, believe it or not, to many policies that we advocate on justice reform. We have too many people incarcerated, we don't have enough resources to make sure that corrections officers have the things that they need, they're in danger because of overcrowding. If they don't have the tools, as the panelists talked earlier about, to help reform and rehabilitate, what's the purpose of the job?

I think that's kind of where it all comes down. The real issue, it seems to me, is do we treat the symptoms? All due respect, mental health care is important, but it's a bandaid, as Mr. Walker told me during a break. Or are we treating the problems caused by the system? And it really, again, to steal a line from Mr. Walker, it comes down to humanity, it seems to me.

Prisons cannot be places where officers or inmates have to check their humanity at the door.

Because then it becomes a horrible job that nobody wants to do, and it's no longer a profession, it's a job. So it seems to me that we really need to not, well we have to focus on the symptoms, I agree with everybody I've heard today.

But we really have to focus on the change of culture, the change of mission, so that people who decide to go into this profession, as opposed to for the job, are going in there because they're rewarded. They're rewarded economically. They're rewarded spiritually and emotionally, and they have job satisfaction. If all you're doing is carrying the keys, I'm not sure that's a great job. And then it is, as the professor talked about, it becomes a stop over for other gigs. I'll close with this, and I don't have a question, obviously, we're in D.C., the home of the filibuster. Einstein defined insanity as doing the same thing over and over and over again and expecting a different result. And our bottom line has to be the culture of change, which has to focus on rehabilitation, which makes progress on officer safety. Yes. The short term Band-Aids, as we talked about, are important. But until we transform prisons from human warehouses to places of accountability and rehabilitation, I'm afraid we're going to continue the insanity going forward. And so my only advice, hope, prayer, wish, is that everybody in this room starts to echo the messages that we've heard today, not to each other, because that's a little bit of preaching to the choir. But to the people that actually set budgets, make the rules, decide who does and doesn't have to go to prison and for how long. Those are the critical tools of change. And I think it's so good, so healthy for you all, and, you know, kudos to you, Simon and Andy, to bring this diverse group together because we got to stop talking to ourselves and we got to start talking those crazy people up the street and in every state capital around the country.



**COMMISSIONER
NNEKA TAPIA JONES**

Thank you. I'm a warn you now, Simon, I'm probably going to go over my time because I've been sitting here holding them a lot, so I apologize. But like my fellow commissioners, I want to thank everyone who has provided testimony here today, it has been incredibly moving and powerful. But I have some comments that I prepared that I want to share. But before I do that, I also want to respond to the panelists who just spoke with us and not offer a question, but just a mere comment for something that I feel like we need to bring into this room and to think about. But, Mr. Larsen, you said something that, you said a lot that resonated with me, but one thing was the question that you asked yourselves in Norway, the two questions that you asked, what led to this and why are we here? And I was struck by that because the reality in this country is that we have to have a conversation about how racism has gotten us to the point where we are today. This system that we have in this country of mass incarceration is rooted in a fear of black and brown people. And I heard the gasp in the room as Mr. Larsen you said that the staffing ratio was 1.1 staff members to 1 person incarcerated. And I've heard many comments here today about how we need to recruit more staff and what we can do to recruit more staff. And I respect those comments, but I also challenge all of us and everyone listening today to think about how we dispel that fear of racism and the people who are incarcerated in these facilities. And to think about how we can decarcerate more people. It's not just about hiring more staff, but it's about reducing the number of people who are negatively impacted by the system. And so that is my challenge to all of us today, to think about the power that we have in this room, to really champion decarceration as a part of this effort. Now, I also wanted to share that it was really early in my training as a clinical psychologist that I knew I wanted to specialize in correctional mental health. It was because of my life experiences, which I won't bother to go into now because Simon will nudge me, but that I knew that I wanted to go into this field because there were people leaving these systems that were broken, and that was the people who were incarcerated. And I knew that was my purpose to support them in one of the lowest moments that I felt that they had endured. And it was in my first week working at Cook County Jail in Chicago, where I was greeted by a bubbly sergeant. And his laughter was boisterous. His personality was larger than life.

He was my go-to guy. Anything I needed, he did. He would often say 'anything you need Doc'. That was our banter back and forth. And one Friday morning, May 1st, 2009, my go-to guy was no longer here. He had died by suicide. Now, he was not the first nor the last officer friend I lost, sadly. And it was in that moment that I knew my purpose was expanded to not just help the people who were leaving the institution, who had been confined that were broken, but also to help the staff who were leaving the institution and were also broken. And so when I made Warden in May of 2015, that was my focus, to support the people who were incarcerated and to support the staff. To think about the programs and the policies that we could change to make wellness essential, but to also bring light into a dark facility. We were only able to do that by working with our staff and by working with the people who were incarcerated and by working with the community. Someone spoke about the power in having allies, and that was the power that we were able to bring to life. And because of that, we were able to reduce the population at Cook County Jail by more than 20%. Staff began to feel safer. It's nowhere near what it needs to be because it's still a dark correctional institution like every correctional institution in this country. I left that system in May of 2018 because I, as an administrator, was broken. And I realized that the system wasn't just breaking people incarcerated and it wasn't just breaking staff, it was also breaking administrators.

Every one who comes into contact with that system is devastated by it.

And it was in my current role as the managing director of justice initiatives at an organization called Chicago Beyond, we're an impact investor fighting for justice. It's in this role that I have been able to take all of those cumulative experiences and to work with all of those groups, current and former correctional leaders, current and former correctional staff, people who are incarcerated and people who have been incarcerated and community members. And to say we have to invoke change. We can no longer sit on the sidelines. We just recently published, Do I have the right to feel safe? And I ask that each of you go to our website, ChicagoBeyond.org and download this publication because it was written with Andy Potter, Simon Greer, Corey Post, and the whole One Voice United team. And it was also written with Just Leadership USA and many people who have been incarcerated in this system. And it was written with people who have been survivors of crime, the people that we say this system is supposed to protect, but it doesn't.

And it was written with families who have been impacted by incarceration. Together, we can change this system. We all have the right for holistic safety. That's creating communities where we all feel protected and whole and resilient. But it's going to take all of us to unite and have some of those difficult conversations and to realize that even though we come from divergent pathways, we all want the same thing. To be safe and to be well. And together we can do that.



**COMMISSIONER
RABBI JONAH PESNER**

Thank you, Simon and Andy, and thank you to everybody. As we come towards the final moments that we're going to share together today, let's take a collective deep breath. Take a moment and look around the room in this Sacred Assembly, because our time here is coming short, but the sanctity of these moments we have shared and the stories we have heard, need to stay with us and inspire us as we go forth on our journey. It's recorded in Hebrew scripture that my ancestors, the children of Israel, the Hebrew slaves, cried out in a collective lament. And it was then that God heard their cries and began the process of redemption. The transformation of a people in a box. Trapped, and suffocating, having been stripped of their humanity. To be transformed into a people that could be free and breathe. Today we have heard that collective cry. The lament of the families. The families of the officers and the staff, the women and the men who toil in the box. The families of incarcerated people who live and die in the box. We are taught in Ezekiel, God says, as surely as I live, it is not the death of someone who has done wrong that I seek. But rather that she or he return, and live. So forgive us, God, because, your children are dying. The officers and the staff and the people who are trapped in the box are dying. And that as surely as you live, Oh God, is the sin. So challenge us, inspire us, and guide us, O God, as we go forth on our journey. To realize that correction, in your ancient language, Tikkun. Tikkun means repair, return and heal. *[Hebrew scripture non-transcribable]*... may we repair all that is broken here on earth, so that our world will be like the heavenly kingdom above a place of love and life and mercy for all your children. Amen.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Where do we go from here? The Blue Ribbon Commission report is not just about looking back, but also looking forward.

The following recommendations were synthesized by the One Voice United team after reflecting on the testimony, commissioner responses, and feedback we received from the broader audience at the Blue Ribbon Commission. We acknowledge that not everyone in attendance will agree with every recommendation on this list, but we have done our best to capture those in which we saw greatest alignment and potential for impact.

In seeking to build upon the momentum garnered at this first-ever hearing on correctional staff wellness, we hope that all stakeholders will be unified and resolute in understanding that everyone impacted by the correctional system would benefit from a mentally sound and healthy workforce – a goal we hope we can all commit to working toward together. It is also worth noting that regardless of any action step one might take, this Blue Ribbon Commission was a momentous achievement in itself as it brought together a diverse group of stakeholders who collectively agreed that there is a wellness crisis facing correctional staff that must be acknowledged and addressed. What follows then are the post-BRC recommendations and a call to action.

RECOMMENDATIONS

01

Voices from Frontlines.

Correctional staff voices should be included in any forum where the future of correctional policy is debated, and those worker voices should be amplified across media platforms. Increased and meaningful officer representation will result in better outcomes when policy design is not only shaped by wardens and administrators but also informed by the experience and perspective of front-line staff who have the most direct knowledge of how policies turn into practice. Highlighting the importance of including frontline voices also requires that correctional staff of all levels commit to speaking up and raising awareness around the physical and emotional impairments that obstruct those on the frontlines from performing their duties. When staff feel seen, heard and valued they are more likely to have positive experiences on the job, which can result in a workforce that is more inclined to be invested in the future of their work and committed to the longer term outcomes. Efforts aimed at both including and empowering frontline voices have the potential to elevate the corrections profession as a key stakeholder in transforming the system that is currently harming everyone it touches.

“THIS HAS NOT BEEN AN EASY REFORM, AND I DON’T THINK IT WOULD HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE WITHOUT THE COOPERATION BETWEEN THE EMPLOYER SIDE AND THE UNIONS TO THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX, TO IMAGINE A DIFFERENT WAY OF DOING THINGS AND TO INSURE THAT THOSE OF US WHO WORK ON THE FRONTLINES EVERYDAY HAVE OUR INTERESTS AND VOICES RECOGNIZED AND SO THAT THE NEW SYSTEM WORKS FOR US AND FOR EVERYONE IT TOUCHES.”

– TESTIFIER TOR ERIK LARSEN

RECOMMENDATIONS

02

Tell Stories.

The corrections profession has long been overlooked for the vital role its staff plays in law enforcement, first responder and essential worker community. Much of that is the result of a work environment shielded from the public eye. The day-to-day burdens, as well as the heroic actions, are usually known only between correctional staff and the outcome has been a false and negative narrative about correctional staff painted by sensationalists outside of the profession. If more staff are encouraged to share their stories, more truth will be injected into the conversation. By bringing forward new, different, and honest accounts of correctional officers and the system they operate in, it is possible to change the narrative. A nationwide strategy seeking culture change, beginning with changing this narrative, is an important step that can help correctional staff to see themselves, and be looked to by others, as professionals who are serving the public with dignity and honor. Human resilience is, in many instances, tied to our narratives. Increasing the frequency in which correctional staff are seen as positive agents of change will help to bolster their mental health while further opening up possibilities for them to actively contribute to a legacy of transforming the correctional system.

**“YOU HAVE POWER IN
YOUR STORIES”**

– COMMISSIONER JULIENE JAMES

RECOMMENDATIONS

03

National Training, Recruitment and Retention.

Correctional institutions are like cities unto themselves and their staff have been utilized as far more than just public safety providers. On any given day, correctional officers are asked to serve in a functioning hospital, drug rehabilitation clinic, mental health counseling center, school, job training facility and to provide transportation and security statewide. While the corrections landscape continues to evolve, the training curriculum has not kept pace with those changes. By investing in increased training and specialization, officers will have an enhanced capacity for ensuring the betterment of the people under their supervision and the national workforce will be better equipped to meet the growing demands of modern-day corrections. Furthermore, the current wellness and staffing crisis facing corrections today demands that the current approach to training be adjusted to meet this emerging dynamic. Although attention to physical self-defense is an important component of training for officers and staff, far too little attention is paid to the need for emotional intelligence training, mental health awareness and practices, the art of de-escalation and transformational leadership. The issue of staff wellness in corrections must become a core tenant of any training academy and ongoing training curriculum. And most importantly, addressing the nationwide staffing shortage that is wreaking havoc on everyone behind the walls requires more concerted recognition of these brave men and women as law enforcement professionals who deserve a commensurate salary and benefits structure.

“FOR THOSE OF US IN POLICY, COUNTING ME, I THINK IT IS ON US TO SAY TO POLICYMAKERS THAT INVESTMENT IN THE PROFESSIONAL CAREERS ASSOCIATED WITH THIS LINE OF POLICY IS CRUCIAL. PEOPLE ARE DYING BECAUSE THIS IS NOT BEING COMPENSATED PROPERLY.”

– COMMISSIONER DAVID PITTS

RECOMMENDATIONS

04

Centering Health + Safety.

For any reform package to truly be effective, the officers and staff who work in correctional facilities must also be protected against incapacitating physical, mental, and emotional health problems, or any other hazards of the job. Their wellness and safety are crucial for them, their colleagues, those they supervise, and the broader community. Investments in officer wellness, training, continuing education, and career advancement all have the potential to lead to breakthroughs in transforming the nature of incarceration. Rather than viewing these expenditures as being at odds with reform efforts, they should be pursued in tandem. Policy research and campaigns seeking to transform correctional practices should be grounded in an understanding of facility-wide safety needs. These reform campaigns must incorporate the occupational and psychological well-being of the correctional employees who are the key to the transformations they envision. It should be clear to everyone that individuals struggling with depression and trauma are unlikely to have the willingness, nor capacity, to be effective agents of change. If reform efforts continue to overlook officers and staff in this process, not only will the efforts lose out on the important insights they have to offer, but by making them “invisible” those seeking change risk further damaging a workforce already struggling with a lack of agency, autonomy and dignity — and in desperate need of healing and support. Sadly, despite all the talk of reform, there remain far too many officers and staff struggling to receive adequate attention and treatment for this silent killer. Politicians, DOC administrators and union leaders should collaborate with local practitioners and treatment providers in securing support services that can be readily available for any worker (or family member) in need of help and those resources should be accessible in ways that do not present a risk to one’s job, reputation or safety.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Centering Health + Safety (continued).

As national efforts continue seeking to reform our system of incarceration, the health, safety, and wellness of those working in prisons must be prioritized. After all, as it is those workers who will be tasked with implementing any reforms and ultimately be responsible for ensuring their success.

WITHOUT ACTION, WITHOUT FOLLOW THROUGH,
INTENTIONS TO ADDRESS THE MENTAL HEALTH AND
WELLNESS OF CORRECTIONS OFFICERS ARE MEANINGLESS”

– TESTIFIER WILLIAM YOUNG

“WE FORGET THAT IF STAFF ARE NOT SAFE AND FEEL SAFE AND
FEEL TAKEN CARE OF, THEY ARE NOT GOING TO BE DELIVERING
WHAT YOU WANT THEM TO DELIVER. THERE IS NO WAY, NO WAY,
THAT THE MISSION OF AN AGENCY FOR REHABILITATION WILL BE
ACCOMPLISHED WITH IMPAIRED, BROKEN DOWN, EXHAUSTED,
FREAKED OUT, PARANOID, REACTIVE STAFF...WE'RE KIDDING
OURSELVES IF WE THINK THAT WE'RE GOING TO HAVE GOOD
REHABILITATION. STAFF THAT FEEL UNSAFE ARE GOING TO
CHECK THE BOX, PAY LIP SERVICE TO REHABILITATION
APPROACHES, BUT THE REAL THING IS NOT GOING TO REALLY
HAPPEN. WE NEED TO HAVE HEALTHY STAFF. THE BIGGEST
INVESTMENT AN AGENCY CAN DO OR ANYBODY WHO CARES
ABOUT THE RIGHTS OF THE INCARCERATED - THE BIGGEST THING
THEY COULD DO IN MY BOOK IS DO EVERYTHING THEY CAN DO
TO KEEP THE STAFF SAFE AND HEALTHY.”

– TESTIFIER CATARINA SPINARIS

RECOMMENDATIONS

05

Cross Lines of Difference.

The mental health of everyone associated with our correctional system is strained. Officers, staff, civilians, administrators, those who are incarcerated and their loved ones are all negatively impacted by the current system. To reform corrections in ways that truly make it mentally and physically safer for the officers and staff who work in prisons, as well as for those individuals who reside there, it is going to take a concerted and sustained effort by all stakeholders. Meaningful and respectful dialogue between unlikely allies, even those who hold competing views of the problem, is a critical component for making positive change. Regardless of your point of entry into this conversation or the stakeholders to whom you feel the greatest allegiance, the path toward repair requires breaking through barriers and looking together for innovative solutions to improve the health, safety, and livelihood of everyone who is touched by the correctional system. While it may sound like a long shot, if we can find ways to come together and to forge common ground solutions, the chances of sustainable transformation will be greatly enhanced.

“TOGETHER WE CAN CHANGE THE SYSTEM...BUT IT’S GOING TO TAKE ALL OF US TO UNITE AND HAVE SOME OF THOSE DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS AND TO REALIZE THAT EVEN THOUGH WE COME FROM DIVERGENT PATHWAYS, WE ALL WANT THE SAME THING, TO BE SAFE AND TO BE WELL, AND TOGETHER WE CAN DO THAT”

– COMMISSIONER NNEKA JONES TAPIA

RECOMMENDATIONS

06

DOC Culture Change

From the moment a new cadet begins the academy, all the way through to their retirement, the correctional workforce should be educated about the risks of the job and provided with ample resources for accessing support. To help facilitate this needed culture change, officers and staff should be encouraged to ask for help and everyone in the correctional profession must reject the notion that symptoms resulting from PTSD indicate a weakness. A workforce that is forced to suppress their own trauma is unlikely to have the physical and mental capacity that would be expected of staff who are charged with supervising and caring for some of our nation's most vulnerable populations. If we expect correctional facilities to transform into places that foster healing and rehabilitation, it needs to start from the top. De-stigmatization of occupationally induced stress and other mental health injuries requires administrative buy-in and a new precedent must be set that ensures staff are not retaliated against when reaching out for help. In addition to promoting the use of Employee Assistance Programs, agencies should build a support program for staff's family members that regularly educates them on the signs of stress, depression, and PTSI and offers emotional and professional guidance. Operating procedures such as pre-shift briefings and critical incident debriefings are both examples of sound policy options that go beyond individual staff investment. This is because such policies create ripples that enhance facility-wide safety. Finally, adopting staff wellness programs, offering more frequent training opportunities and promoting peer support systems are all important considerations that can actually save lives currently being lost to this epidemic.

"IT TAKES TIME TO REFORM ANYTHING BUT ESPECIALLY, CORRECTIONS, BECAUSE YOU ARE NOT JUST REFORMING A SECTOR OF PUBLIC SERVICE, YOU ARE CHANGING PARTS OF A CULTURAL IDENTITY IN A NATION. TO DO THAT, IT'S IMPORTANT TO HAVE AS MANY ALLIES AS POSSIBLE WHEN YOU START." – TESTIFIER TOR ERIK LARSEN

RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion...

Regardless of where you come from, one thing is undeniable. There exists a serious wellness issue within the U.S. prison system that affects every individual who lives and works behind the walls. To change the future of corrections, we must work together to combat this crisis. And we must understand that the living conditions for those who are incarcerated are the same as the working conditions for those who serve as officers and staff. Everyone from educators, to administrators, to advocacy leaders and policy makers can play a role in improving those conditions. We all have something to gain from transforming a system that for too long has been failing to rehabilitate the majority of those who are incarcerated and stealing years off the life expectancy of those who work there.

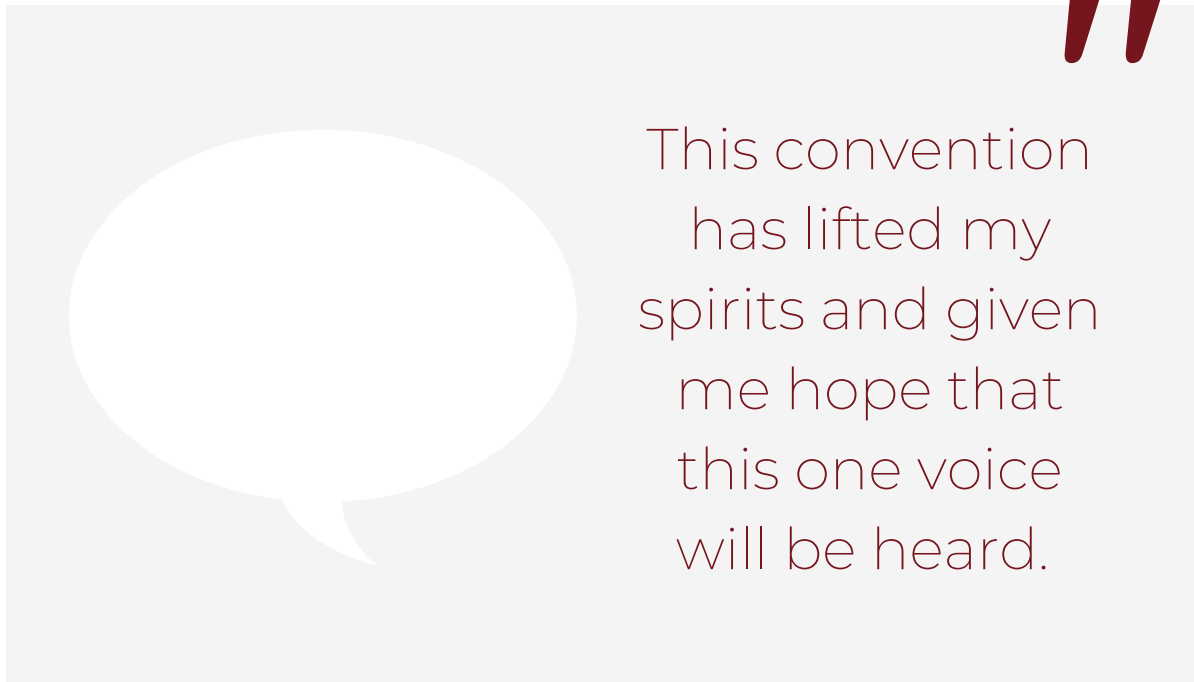
The question now is only, will we do it?

**“THE SECRET IS OUT,
THE SILENCE IS BROKEN
AND WE HAVE TO ACT”**


– COMMISSIONER MARY KAY HENRY

AUDIENCE REACTIONS

During the days and weeks following the event, attendees of the Blue Ribbon Commission shared their reactions with One Voice United through email and an anonymous post-event survey. The following are just a few of those reactions.



AUDIENCE REACTIONS



Thank you for the opportunity and privilege to attend this conference. As a retired Corrections Officer and as Union Organizer now. This is a true testament to the overall mental health for our correctional staff. I would like to get more involved in any way I can. This has rejuvenated me to do more and to share stories with others. The opportunity to go to the Capital and speak to Congressman Pappas is something I will always remember. I served 21 years as a Correctional Officer –retiring as a Lieutenant and an additional 14 years in the Military 8-USMC and 6-National Guard. This was one the greatest Honors in my life. I personally can't wait for the next conference and to learn/do more. Please let me know if anything is needed or what I can do to help!!

AUDIENCE REACTIONS

OVU has a grace about it like I haven't experienced with any organization that I've worked with. To say that I was blown away by the whole week is the understatement of the year and to think, you included me in on everything -- still pretty overwhelmed by it all. I can't predict much of my future, but I can say for sure that I am a part of the OVU family and you have my unyielding partnership, support, working hands, and whatever you need to help further the OVU mission. I love all that I witnessed and experienced...can't wait to help continue the work.

AUDIENCE REACTIONS





Amazing discussion on a topic that has been walked around and ignored for decades. This discussion gives a chance on real change. Trauma-informed care for both staff and inmates living in the same housing unit together.

APPENDIX

Below are links to key items we created for the Blue Ribbon Commission gathering. We are sharing these not only to give more detail on the BRC but also as a toolkit for those who may want to create a gathering of their own.

	<u>BRC</u> <u>PROGRAM</u> <u>BOOK</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agenda• Speaker Bios• Staffing Survey
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<u>OVU FAQs</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is One Voice United?• Is OVU a Union?• What do you mean by "provide a national voice"?• How can I participate?	
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	<u>Other</u> <u>Materials</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• BRC Commissioner Invite• Speaker Preparation• BRC Run of Show
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