

Tiffany Harrington  
355 St. Paul St., #9  
Burlington VT 05401

Hello esteemed committee members:

I'm here today as a directly impacted, formerly incarcerated person of the VT corrections system. My name is Tiffany Harrington and I was under supervision of DOC for 15 years for my first and only criminal charge. I naively accepted the first offer presented to me by my public defender. One mistake and the life I painstakingly built, brick by brick, for myself and my children, was crushed to smithereens. I could talk for hours and tell you countless true stories and examples of the negative impact that corrections has had on me and my friends and family. I could tell you about the discrimination and mistreatment I've experienced at the hands of those responsible for helping me. I could discuss a corrections officer who publicly made fun of my hearing impairment and refused to follow orders from higher ups instructing him to accommodate me and how to do so, just because he could and was in a position of power over me.

Today however, I want to briefly discuss the reality of prison culture and how different it is from what the general public is led to believe; and frankly, how extremely dangerous and detrimental it is to a whole group of people who are caught up in a cycle of poverty and crime because they can't see any other option to stay afloat or get ahead other than to commit crimes for survival. Our society needs alternatives to incarceration that actually address underlying problems, ultimately correcting something, versus breaking our communities down.

I would say easily, at least 90% or more of incarcerated people at CRCF are survivors of domestic assault and/or sexual assault, myself included. I have mental health challenges that were undiagnosed at the time when I committed my crime. Since then, I also have been diagnosed with serious post traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, largely due to my time under supervision. And I am the rule, not the exception. Over the past couple years, at least 40 formerly incarcerated women that I became friends with, for lack of any other social interactions, have overdosed and died, following their horrendous experiences in prison and being separated, most permanently, from their children and family members. Over my 15 years, I was in and out of prison several times, for usually about a year at a time, due to minor technical infractions that didn't have to be proven by DOC, and my lack of resilience or money expectations. My first eight years after my initial six months inside, I received no violations at all. Then I was assigned a new probation officer. I have served about five years inside simply due to my lack of financial resources. I am allowed to have custody of my sons and allowed to reside in a BHA subsidized housing complex, but as a violent offender, I am not eligible for subsidized housing or a housing voucher, and these are priced at market rate, which is \$1,300 per month, plus utilities for my apartment, which I need to maintain in order to keep my 3-year-old son with me. I am a hard

worker, but most places with a livable wage won't give me a chance, and in fact, most places, including most gas stations or fast food restaurants won't allow me to work. It feels pretty hopeless, but I haven't given up and won't because I have kids who need me and have no one else.

I've given birth to two children while incarcerated. The year that I maxed out, I had my 3 year old son and my entire pregnancy behind bars due to lack of residence or the financial means to obtain a residence. I was ineligible for most programming, including sublet housing due to my status as a violent offender. DOC estimates that it costs about \$100,000 per year to keep a female inmate housed. When someone has medical issues and is at high risk, I'm sure it's quite a bit more than that.

All of my pregnancies have been high risk. My youngest son was no exception. I had preeclampsia in all of them. Despite being hungry, incredibly uncomfortable, and unsupported by any outside means. I did my best to keep my head up and stay positive. When I approached medical staff, I was usually shut down. Countless ailments went largely untreated, but I always believed in choosing a positive mindset, so I did. I worked a laundry job in the facility and earned \$3.00 a day, and stayed active walking the track outside at Rec. I planned as much as possible for my post-release life with a new baby. I miraculously was granted admission to the Lund home following my release, which I thought was my best chance of providing my baby with some stability, services, and support. I had a C-section on November 1st, 2019. While in the hospital, I began showing signs that physically something was wrong with me. Usually my blood pressure is fairly low and steady, but it was bouncing all over the place. With my medical history, the docs and nursing staff were becoming concerned. However, DOC and CRCF required a CO to be at the hospital with me at all times. I remember one male officer wouldn't even leave the room while a doctor examined my lady parts. It was humiliating. The doctor even said to him, "Please stand outside the room, next to the door. She can't even walk and just had a very painful, major surgery."

When it came time for my discharge from UVM Medical Center, the nurses were extremely scared to return me to the facility for fear of my health and safety. The prison, however, was short-staffed as per usual, and didn't like having to keep a CO with me. The hospital staff called CRCF medical staff and gave very clear instructions to keep me on all my medications, and to check my blood pressure at least three times per day, but preferably every four hours as my blood pressure was indicative of a problem. I was really struggling being separated from my newborn. They promised the hospital that they would allow these orders. Literally as soon as I returned, the medical staff chose to ignore the medical instructions. Day after day, I felt worse and worse. I put in sick call slips after slips and said something at every medical call. I kept getting blown off. There wasn't anyone available to check in with me psychologically either and all I thought about was ending my life. My friends on the unit could see that I could barely stand up and were putting in medical slips on my behalf as well. This was about two weeks after I had given birth and I had yet to have my blood pressure taken, a simple,

non-invasive, quick thing. Finally my friend on the unit contacted her friend who worked for the ACLU. She then called the prison and convinced the medical staff to take my blood pressure right away. It was so high I wasn't allowed to walk back to my unit or even get off the exam table! An ambulance arrived, loaded me into the back, and started an IV. On the ride to the hospital, I lost consciousness and started having seizure activity. Apparently, it looked like I was having a stroke. Upon arrival I was immediately admitted; my head literally felt like her it was going to pop right off. I had post-partum eclampsia, an extremely dangerous and often fatal, condition, and had to stay in the hospital for several days to get it under control. I had some damage to my organs as well. I almost died because the medical staff at CRCF chose to ignore strict medical orders from the hospital.

There are so many stories like this that would absolutely stun you. Truly with the amount of money being spent for a new facility, DOC could actually correct something and make a difference to so many people. These families need financial security and stability, not pointless, harmful, punitive action. Families need help sometimes, not money spent on prisons or foster care for the kids of the incarcerated. The state could actually buy a house and a car for each of these families to give them and still spend less than the proposed 70 million. Please think about the families and people whose lives you affect with the laws and bills.

Thank you.