



DATE: June 3, 2020
TO: House Appropriations Committee
FROM: Women's Legislative Caucus
Reps. Lynn Bachelor, Mollie Burke and Jean O'Sullivan Co-Chairs; and
Rep. Marybeth Redmond, Communications

Over the past two years, the Women's Caucus has focused on the health and well-being of Vermont's incarcerated women (a decades-long priority of the caucus). Our members are committed to ensuring that Vermont has a criminal justice system that is equitable and rehabilitative; a system where sentenced and incarcerated Vermonters have access to due process and programs and services that meet their needs and set them up for successful reentry and participation in our communities; a system where people are treated with dignity and respect; and a system that ensures public safety.

As a caucus we have been closely following the work of the House Corrections and Institutions Committee and S.338, the Justice Reinvestment II bill. We as a caucus stand in wholehearted support of this legislation and the \$2 million appropriation associated with it. This bill represents months of research by the Council on State Government (CSG) who worked with the three branches of Vermont state government and key stakeholders to better understand the drivers of crime, recidivism and prison population in Vermont, as well as to help synthesize mountains of criminal justice data.

CSG's report highlighted that nearly 80 percent of sentenced DOC admissions are for people returned or revoked from furlough, parole, and probation often due to work failures, loss of housing, and drug/alcohol issues. CSG's report emphasized that available reentry/transitional housing does not match the needs of people leaving incarceration. Additionally, there is a lack of access to and availability of programs and supports to transition successfully back into communities.

Shifting Vermont's sentenced population trajectory and reducing out-of-state contract beds can only be achieved if we make upfront investments to fund immediate improvements and resources in the community with cost-savings and reinvestments to follow.

In its report, CSG demonstrated that by making the policy changes and investments included in S.338, we can reduce the prison population by approximately 106 to 135 people by the end of FY2025 that would then generate \$11 to \$14 million in averted costs; and how those dollars are reinvested into the system would result in more effective programs and outcomes.

We believe that the \$2 million of strategic investment included in S.338 to the Agency of Human Services for risk-based domestic violence intervention programming, evidence-based transitional housing, workforce development, and supports to ensure successful reentry for those leaving prison are critical to S.338 in its goals of lowering recidivism and re-incarceration rates, which will result in savings and greater public safety.

We urge that the House Committee on Appropriations include the \$2 million appropriation in the FY21 budget, which will enable Justice Reinvestment II to achieve its intended goals of reducing re-incarceration and support Vermonters in their reentries to becoming productive members of our communities. Generous thanks for your consideration.