

Timothy Burgess
Testimony regarding Corrections Monitoring Committee
Corrections & Institutions Committee

April 17, 2024

Committee members,

Good morning. For the record, my name is Timothy Burgess, and I serve as the Co-Chairperson of the Corrections Monitoring Committee (CMC), alongside the other Co-chair Ashley Messier; I am a justice impacted advocate, and Executive Director of VT CURE.

Let me begin by saying that the service to the CMC is a privilege, serving alongside Ashley puts Vermont in a unique place. To the best of my knowledge there are no other States that have two people who have been involved in the criminal justice system, in similar positions, working with the Legislature, and Corrections on the issues outlined in the statute.

It has been my experience, during my service, that the directive for the CMC has been a monumental task in organizing and mission. While we have worked diligently to keep the day-to-day functioning of the CMC in order, there have been some very real obstacles, ranging from filling vacancies, of stakeholder groups defined in statute.

The CMC holds out the real promise of change with a few modifications in the current instruction. It is paramount to the set goals that the time for the expiration of the commission be moved further out. The July 2025 term of expiration does not provide the required amount of time to achieve the goals; I would urge this committee to add another five (5) years to the current repeal deadline, 2030. Members of this committee are aware of the PRIIN (Prison Research and Innovation) initiative, which I have served on since 2020, that program aims to accomplish many of the goals set fourth in statute, and through oversight. Once the final analysis is complete from PRIN, there will continue to be work and oversight needed to accomplish and carry out directives and policies with both the Legislative and Corrections findings.

In addition to moving the expiration date for the commission, a change to the charge will help focus the purpose and increase the effectiveness for the intended creation of the commission, and the PRIN, in my opinion. I am attaching for the committee's review an executive order issued by Arizona's Governor, Hobbs. As members of this committee can see the direction that Governor Hobbs took with her executive order, can provide needed changes in our State. Every aspect of the Vermont statute that defines the purpose of the CMC is outlined in the Arizona order. While providing much needed oversight on matters that continue the progress our State hopes to achieve. Unlike Arizona, Vermont has an opportunity to set the policy in statute and not in an executive order. I strongly encourage that the Arizona model be the direction of the CMC, moving forward. A direction that addresses the principles outlined in Justice Reinvestment, and the legislation that gave rise to the CMC.

Finally, Governor George Aiken created the "Little Hoover" Commission, in Vermont in the 1940's. The purpose of the Commission was to examine the workings of Vermont State

Government. Dean Davis continued the work in the early 1970's. The intent of both Governor(s) Aiken and Davis was to address matters that affect State government. Today, the Corrections Monitoring Committee can continue those efforts of both oversight and coordination with matters that are relevant in our current Corrections Department. I encourage this committee to follow in these footsteps, allow the CMC to continue the work, through at least a five-year expiration of the CMC. Take the bold steps other States have taken and continue to provide oversight and accountability.

Thank you for your time, and I will make myself available for questions or comments.

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Co-Chair

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