

Sentencing Commission Testimony November 3, 2016

Good morning, Chairman Santa, and esteemed members of the Sentencing Commission. Thank you for the privilege to speak on pre-trial and bail issues.

My name is Beatrice Codianni. I live in New Haven. I am the Managing Editor of Reentry Central, a newsletter on criminal justice that is circulated weekly to approximately 9000 criminal justice professionals nationwide. I also am a co-founder of the National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls, and co-founder and co-chair of the Women's Resettlement Working Group, an off shoot of Project Fresh Start in New Haven. Additionally, I am a member of Connecticut Bail Fund's Community Advisory Board. I am a formerly incarcerated woman who served 15 years in prison.

I come here today to talk about women in pretrial detention because they cannot afford bail. A recent report "Criminalization of poverty: New data on women in Connecticut jails" found that as progressive as Connecticut is regarding criminal justice reform, relatively speaking, Connecticut still has a high rate of incarcerated women.

At this time there are approximately 347 women incarcerated at the York Correctional Institution, at taxpayers' expense, because they cannot afford bail. Many have children. Think what could be done with this money for the kids whose Moms are locked up. We destroy the kids, we destroy the families, and then we expect everybody to get released and play nice.

Visits from children can be few and far between because Niantic is not near major cities. Often children are swept into foster care if there is no one to take care of them. Even if a relative or friend wants to take care of them, there is a vetting process by DCF that can take time, and kids are put in foster care that can be far from their school and neighborhood while the vetting takes place. The cost of pretrial detention and foster care is too high, fiscally and morally. Studies show that children suffer from emotional problems and to do poorly in school when a

mom is incarcerated. Having a mom locked up is also stigmatizing. A woman may also lose her home or her job while awaiting her court date. Missing medical appointments is also a collateral consequence. The presumption of innocence becomes a hollow phrase of the criminal justice system when people are kept locked up because they can't afford bail.

I would like to see our legislators pass an AN ACT PROVIDING COMMUNITY-BASED SENTENCING ALTERNATIVES FOR PRIMARY CAREGIVERS OF DEPENDENT CHILDREN, which applies to primary caregivers of any gender charged with a nonviolent offense. This would be a diversionary program that would keep families intact and would provide necessary services to help many caregivers and their children and help the caregiver stay out of prison and with his or her children. I have already proposed this Act to some of our legislators from New Haven.

I also think it's very important that the Sentencing Commission include formally incarcerated people to take part in the pre-trial discussions and decisions. The National Council of Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls' motto is "Nothing about us without us." Formerly incarcerated people are the experts. We have the knowledge and experience. We know better than anyone what works and what doesn't. Including us on any commission dealing with criminal justice issues is imperative if meaningful criminal justice reform is to be created and implemented. Thank you.