

CONNECTICUT SENTENCING COMMISSION SYMPOSIUM

# Mental Health and the Criminal Legal System in Connecticut

Thursday, November 16th, 2023  
8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

University of Connecticut School of Law  
William F. Starr Hall | 55 Elizabeth Street, Hartford



Connecticut Sentencing Commission  
University of Connecticut

10 Prospect Street, Hartford, CT 06103  
[ctsentencingcommission.org](http://ctsentencingcommission.org)

*DR. BENJAMIN HOWELL, SEICHE Center for Health and Justice, Yale School of Medicine*



Benjamin A. Howell, MD, MPH, MHS is an assistant professor of medicine in the Yale School of Medicine and faculty in Yale's SEICHE Center for Health and Justice and the Yale Program in Addiction Medicine. Dr. Howell's research is focused on improving the health of individuals, families, and communities impacted by mass incarceration with a special focus on the impact of addiction and mental health disorders.

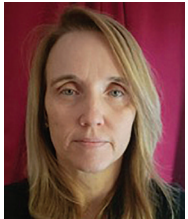
*MARK WHITE, Judicial Branch Court Support Services Division*



Mark White is the Director of Operations for the CT Judicial Branch, Court Support Services Division, Adult Probation Services, a position he has held since July of 2022. In this role, he oversees, manages, administers, and supervises all functions associated with the overall operations of adult probation services. From 2015 to 2022, Mr. White served as the First Deputy Commissioner for the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services. In addition, he also served as the Deputy Commissioner for the Office of Youth Justice. Preceding Mark's career in New York, he worked 17 years for the Connecticut Judicial Branch serving in various positions.

## MENTAL HEALTH AND REENTRY PANEL

**MODERATOR: PATRICIA O'ROURKE, *Connecticut Sentencing Commission***



Patricia O'Rourke, PhD is a Research Associate with the Connecticut Sentencing Commission, focused on developing and implementing the Commission's research and policy agenda. While completing her doctoral studies in Education, Dr. O'Rourke pursued a transdisciplinary path, also earning graduate certificates in Human Rights and Race, Indigeneity, Ethnicity, and Politics to support her work in understanding and advancing racial and social equity. Participating on research teams for federally funded grants in education was a bridge to engaging with intersecting issues of housing, health, and criminal justice in the role of Public Engagement Fellow at the University of Connecticut's Dodd Center for Human Rights.

**CORRIE BETTS, *President Greater Hartford Branch and Chair of CT State Conference Criminal Justice Committee of the NAACP***



As the Second Phase Director at Youth Challenge CT Inc., Corrie Betts has assisted many men to overcome addiction and build meaningful lives free from the shackles of substance abuse. In addition to his professional duties, Corrie is an active community member who is passionate about mentoring young men struggling with substance abuse problems. Corrie is the President of the Greater Hartford NAACP Branch and Chair of the Connecticut State Conference Criminal Justice Committee of the NAACP. He is a minister at Glory Chapel International Cathedral and works with other civil rights organizations and community groups to further the cause of equality and justice.

**BETH HINES, *Community Partners in Action***



Beth Hines has been with Community Partners in Action for over 32 years, serving in a variety of roles, and was appointed its Executive Director in December 2018. She has decades of prison reform expertise along with a history of collaborative relationships with the Connecticut Department of Correction, the Judicial Branch Court Support Services Division, and numerous community agencies across the state. Ms. Hines was a member of Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont's transition team for Human Services and currently co-chairs the Criminal Justice Division for the CT Non-Profit Alliance and Greater Waterbury Reentry Council. She was recently appointed by Governor Lamont to serve on the Criminal Justice Policy Advisory Committee and is also a member of the Steering Committee for the CT Justice Alliance. Ms. Hines holds a BS degree in Sociology from the University of Connecticut.



## ABOUT US

The Sentencing Commission is an independent state criminal justice agency established by law in 2011 to conduct criminal justice policy research. The Commission is a body of senior criminal justice system leaders who convene to coordinate systemic responses to criminal justice problems.

The mission of the commission is to (1) review the state's existing criminal sentencing structure and any proposed changes to it, including existing statutes, proposed criminal justice legislation, and existing and proposed sentencing policies and practices, and (2) make recommendations to the Governor, the General Assembly, and appropriate criminal justice agencies.



## TODAY'S PROGRAM

- 8:30-9:15 a.m. **CHECK-IN AND CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST**
- 9:15-9:30 a.m. **WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS**  
JUDGE ROBIN PAVIA, *Chair, Connecticut Sentencing Commission*  
EBONI S. NELSON, *Dean, University of Connecticut School of Law*
- 9:30-10:45 a.m. **MENTAL HEALTH AND INCARCERATION**  
MODERATOR: JENNIFER ZITO, *Connecticut Sentencing Commission*  
DR. MARTIN G. CHERNIAK, *UConn Health, HITEC*  
MARISOL GARCIA, *Yale Prison Education Initiative*  
CATHERINE OSTEN, *State Senator, 19th District*  
DENISE PALEY, *National Alliance on Mental Illness Connecticut Shoreline*
- 10:45-11:00 a.m. **BREAK**
- 11:00-12:15 p.m. **MENTAL HEALTH, POLICING, AND DIVERSION**  
MODERATOR: CHRISTOPHER BURKE, *Division of Forensic Services at State of Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services*  
DANA BEGIN, *Division of Forensic Services at State of Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services*  
RYAN SIMS, *Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery*  
STEPHEN TAVARES, *Chief of Police and Director of Public Safety, Eastern Connecticut State University*  
JENN VARGAS, *Elm City Compass*
- 12:15-12:45 p.m. **LUNCH**

### KEVIN LAWLOR, *Deputy Chief State's Attorney*



Kevin D. Lawlor is the Deputy Chief State's Attorney of Operations for the Division of Criminal Justice. Deputy Chief State's Attorney Lawlor serves at the Rocky Hill headquarters of the Division of Criminal Justice and is responsible for oversight of the Division's Appellate, Statewide Prosecution and Civil Litigation Bureaus, Housing Matters and the Medicaid Fraud Control, Cold Case, Witness Protection, Conviction Integrity and Workers' Compensation Fraud Units. He currently serves on the Division of Criminal Justice's Legislative, Operations and Ethics Committees. He also serves as counselor to the Chief State's Attorney and the state's 13 State's Attorneys. Prior to his appointment as Deputy Chief, Attorney Lawlor was the Ansonia-Milford State's Attorney for 12 years. He is a tri-chair of the Governor's Task Force Justice for Abused Children, a founding member of the Division of Criminal Justice Diversity Committee and Past President of the Division of Criminal Justice State's Attorney's Advisory Board. He also volunteers to speak to area youth in coordination with the Milford Bar Association, the North Haven Board of Education and other community organizations about criminal justice issues and the legal profession. State's Attorney Lawlor is a graduate of the University of Connecticut and Quinnipiac University School of Law.

### WILLIAM O'CONNOR, *Supervisory Assistant Public Defender, Psychiatric Defense Unit*



William O'Connor, J.D., has worked as an attorney with Connecticut's Division of Public Defender Services since 1997. For eighteen of those years he served as a trial attorney in the Public Defender's Office at the Hartford Superior Court. Currently, Attorney O'Connor supervises the Division's Psychiatric Defense Unit in Middletown, defending individuals committed to the Psychiatric Security Review Board.

## COMPETENCY TO STAND TRIAL PANEL

**MODERATOR: ALEX TSARKOV, *Executive Director Connecticut Sentencing Commission***



Alex Tsarkov joined the Sentencing Commission as its first full-time Executive Director in 2015. As Director, he assists the Commission in its mission to review pre-trial and sentencing policies and make policy recommendations to the General Assembly and the Governor. Prior to joining the Commission, Mr. Tsarkov worked for the Judicial Branch Court Support Services Division (JB-CSSD). Prior to JB-CSSD, he worked at the Connecticut General Assembly from 2007 to 2013. Mr. Tsarkov worked on numerous issues affecting the state's criminal justice system including diversionary programs, eyewitness identification, juvenile sentencing and pretrial justice. Mr. Tsarkov is an Adjunct Professor at the University of Connecticut School of Public Policy and the University of Connecticut School of Law. He holds a Master's of Public Policy degree from Trinity College and is a graduate of the University of Connecticut School of Law.

**JUDGE GERALD HARMON, *Connecticut Superior Court***



Judge Gerald Harmon, M.B.A. was appointed by Governor Dannel Malloy in 2015. Judge Harmon serves as the Presiding Judge for the New Haven Judicial District Part A Criminal Division. His prior work has included both criminal, civil, and family assignments in the Waterbury and Meriden judicial districts. Judge Harmon serves as co-chairperson of the Sentencing Commission mental health subcommittee and serves on several Judicial Branch committees. Additionally, Judge Harmon teaches trial practice at Quinnipiac University School of Law. Prior to his appointment Judge Harmon was a defense attorney in both Federal and State court in Connecticut for over 20 years.

**REENA KAPOOR, *Division of Forensic Services at State of Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services***



Dr. Kapoor is Associate Professor of Psychiatry in the Law & Psychiatry Division, where her clinical work and scholarship focus on the intersection of mental illness, violence, and the criminal justice system. She has expertise in the psychiatric evaluation and treatment of violent and justice-involved individuals in a variety of treatment settings (e.g., prisons, jails, forensic hospitals, and the community). In addition, she serves as a Program Director for the Yale forensic psychiatry fellowship, teaching and supervising fellows in the country's largest training program for forensic psychiatrists. Dr. Kapoor has lectured nationally and internationally on forensic psychiatry and holds leadership positions in several professional organizations. She is chair of the American Psychiatric Association's Committee on Judicial Action and president of the Association of Directors of Forensic Psychiatry Fellowships, as well as a past president of the Connecticut Psychiatric Society and the International Association for Forensic Psychotherapy. Prior to joining the Law & Psychiatry faculty, Dr. Kapoor completed residency training in psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, a forensic psychiatry fellowship at Yale, and medical school at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine.

12:45-1:30 p.m.

**KEYNOTE: PERSPECTIVES ON THE MENTAL HEALTH / CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM INTERFACE**

DR. MICHAEL NORKO, *Division of Forensic Services at State of Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services*

1:30-2:45 p.m.

**COMPETENCY TO STAND TRIAL**

MODERATOR: ALEX TSARKOV, *Connecticut Sentencing Commission*,

JUDGE GERALD HARMON, *Connecticut Superior Court*

DR. REENA KAPOOR, *Division of Forensic Services at State of Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services*

KEVIN LAWLOR, *Deputy Chief State's Attorney*

WILLIAM O'CONNOR, *Supervisory Assistant Public Defender, Psychiatric Defense Unit*

2:45-3:00 p.m.

**BREAK**

3:00-4:15 p.m.

**MENTAL HEALTH AND REENTRY**

MODERATOR: PATRICIA O'ROURKE, *Connecticut Sentencing Commission*

CORRIE BETTS, *President Greater Hartford Branch and Chair of CT State Conference Criminal Justice Committee of the NAACP*

BETH HINES, *Community Partners in Action*

DR. BENJAMIN HOWELL, *SEICHE Center for Health and Justice, Yale School of Medicine*

MARK WHITE, *Judicial Branch Court Support Services Division*

4:15-4:30 p.m.

**FINAL REMARKS**

JUDGE ROBIN PAVIA, *Chair, Connecticut Sentencing Commission*

## OPENING REMARKS

### *EBONI NELSON, Dean, University of Connecticut School of Law*



Eboni S. Nelson, J.D., became dean of the University of Connecticut School of Law on July 31, 2020. She came to UConn from the University of South Carolina School of Law, where she taught for 13 years before serving as the associate dean for academic affairs beginning in 2018. Before joining the South Carolina Law faculty in 2007, Dean Nelson taught at the Thurgood Marshall School of Law and practiced employee benefits law at Bracewell LLP in Houston, Texas. She teaches in the fields of Contracts; Commercial Law; Consumer Law; and Race, Class and Education. Her scholarship, which has been published in numerous law review journals and other publications, focuses on education law and policy, and she is especially interested in the availability of equitable educational opportunities for students of color and those from economically challenged backgrounds. She has been recognized as one of the 100 Most Influential Blacks in Connecticut by the state conference of the NAACP and is the recipient of the 2022 George W. Crawford Black Bar Association Visionary Award.

### *ROBIN PAVIA, Connecticut Superior Court Judge*



Judge Robin Pavia, J.D., was appointed by Governor Jodi Rell and confirmed by the Connecticut General Assembly on April 24, 2007. Judge Pavia serves as the Administrative Judge for the Danbury Judicial District and is the Presiding Judge for criminal, civil and family matters within that jurisdiction. Her prior work has included both criminal and civil assignments in the Bridgeport, Danbury, and Stamford judicial districts. Judge Pavia serves as a member of Connecticut's Sentence Review Division and serves on several Judicial Branch committees. Additionally, Judge Pavia serves as an instructor for the Judicial Branch Pre-Bench Orientation Program and has presented many lectures on criminal law during her tenure on the bench.

### *STEPHEN TAVARES, Chief of Police, Eastern Connecticut State University*



Stephen K. Tavares was appointed as Chief of Police at Eastern Connecticut State University in August of 2021. Chief Tavares is a member of the Eastern CT State University Mental Health Task Force, Connecticut Region 4 School Safety Subcommittee (DEMHS), Connecticut Criminal Justice Policy Advisory Commission (CJPAC) and the Connecticut Sentencing Commission. Prior to Eastern CT State University, Chief Tavares had a distinguished 26-year career with the Bristol, CT, Police Department, retiring as Deputy Chief of Police in August of 2021. During his career, Chief Tavares has been recognized by the community and his peers, being a recipient of the *June Archer Foundation 100 Men of Color Award (Class of 2022)*, *Police Commissioners Association of Connecticut (PCAC Distinguished Chief Award)*, and *Bristol CT Chapter of the NAACP 25 Most Influential African Americans in the City of Bristol*. He has dedicated his professional career to supporting the community through building and maintaining meaningful relationships.

### *JENN VARGAS, Elm City COMPASS*



Jennifer Vargas, LMSW is the Director of Acute Services at Continuum where she oversees the Crisis and Respite Programs and Community Transitional Program. In addition to managing those, she has played a vital role in the most recent project with the City of New Haven and Yale Consultation Center, COMPASS (Compassionate Allies Serving Our Streets). She has called Continuum home for the last 10 years. Serving her community for over 14 years with a focus on co-occurring disorders and the indigent population. Her leadership has assisted with implementing new programs from the ground up and helping existing programs. In her own words "To know this work is to love it".

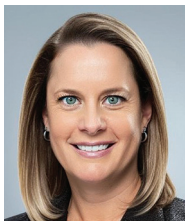
## MENTAL HEALTH, POLICING, AND DIVERSION PANEL

**MODERATOR: CHRISTOPHER BURKE**, *Division of Forensic Services at State of Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services*



Chris Burke currently holds the position of Assistant Director, Division of Forensic Services where he currently manages the Conditional Release Service Unit, the Office of Forensic Evaluation and all community programs of the division. During his twenty-four years with DMHAS, twenty-two of those years have been in the field of forensic and crisis services. Chris has held multiple positions that include Clinical Social Worker, Clinical Social Work Associate, Supervising Clinician and Behavioral Health Clinical Manager. He has a wealth of experience working with individuals and groups at every step along the criminal justice continuum. In addition, he has extensive experience with Crisis Intervention Teams, the Psychiatric Security Review Board (PSRB), jail diversion, mobile crisis teams, and has worked collaboratively with the CT Judicial Branch, law enforcement agencies, Department of Correction, Probation and other community mental health providers.

**DANA BEGIN**, *Division of Forensic Services at State of Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services*



Dana Begin is the Director of the Evidence-Based Practices and Grants Division at the Office of the Commissioner (OOC) within the State of Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). Dana is a registered and licensed Occupational Therapist (OT) and holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Occupational Therapy from Quinnipiac University (2000). She also holds a Master's Degree in Public Administration from the University of Connecticut (2020). Dana has more than 17 years of experience in mental health and joined DMHAS in 2005. Dana is the creator of a functional assessment called the *Learning Inventory of Skills Development (L.I.S.T.)* which is a tool that has been used statewide in the Department of Children and Families (DCF) for youth ages 14 and older.

**RYAN SIMS**, *Recovery Coach Profesional, Jail Diversion, CT Community for Addiction Recovery*



Ryan Sim's primary responsibility is to work closely with Jail Diversion programs in Bridgeport, Hartford, Waterbury, and Danbury. Ryan utilizes his own life experiences and training to support individuals with substance use disorders in finding their own path to recovery.

## KEYNOTE: PERSPECTIVES ON THE MENTAL HEALTH / CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM INTERFACE

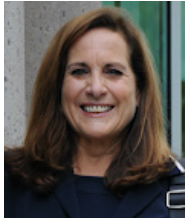
**DR. MICHAEL NORKO**, *Professor of Psychiatry at Yale University School of Medicine in the Law and Psychiatry Division, and Forensic Policy Advisor for the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services*



Michael A. Norko MD, MAR is Professor of Psychiatry at Yale University School of Medicine in the Law and Psychiatry Division; Forensic Policy Advisor for the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS); Editor of the Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law; and a Distinguished Life Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association (APA). He served as Director of Forensic Services for DMHAS from 2007-2023 and worked at Whiting in various capacities between 1988 and 2018. He is a Past President of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law (AAPL) and past Chair of the Forensic Division of the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors. Dr. Norko shared the 2013 Guttmacher Award of the APA and AAPL for "outstanding contribution to the literature on forensic psychiatry" with co-editor Alec Buchanan PhD, MD for *The Psychiatric Report: Principles and Practice in Forensic Writing* (Cambridge University Press, 2011). He has published and presented nationally and internationally on a variety of topics related to psychiatry and law (including his special interests in ethics and the use of the concepts of dangerousness and risk in psychiatric practice), public sector forensic psychiatry, and religion and spirituality in psychiatry.

## MENTAL HEALTH AND INCARCERATION PANEL

### MODERATOR: JENNIFER ZITO, *Connecticut Sentencing Commission*



Jennifer Zito, J.D., has practiced in Connecticut in both the federal and state courts for over 35 years and is currently a solo practitioner in Meriden, Connecticut. Her statewide criminal practice focuses on the representation of juveniles, adolescents, and adults in all criminal matters. Attorney Zito has served in a number of elected and appointed positions including as the President of the Connecticut Criminal Defense Lawyers Association (CCDLA) and the CCDLA representative on the Judicial Branch's Public Service and Trust Commission. Since 2018, she has served as CCDLA's representative on the State of Connecticut Sentencing Commission advocating for legislative and policy changes to the criminal justice system.

### DR. MARTIN CHERNIAK, *UConn Health, HITEC*



Dr. Martin Cherniak, MD, MPH is an occupational medicine physician and Professor Emeritus of Medicine at the University of Connecticut School of Medicine. Since 2006 he has been the Principal Investigator on the Health Improvement Through Employee Control (HITEC) program, directed to the health and well-being of corrections personnel. This work with the corrections workforce both in the State of Connecticut and nationally, is focused on participatory teams of frontline workers, charged with developing intervention programs that combine preventive health with work organization change.

Corrections officer and supervisor Design Team (DT) participatory groups emphasize staff mental health with the goal of improving the overall culture of corrections. These Connecticut programs have been recognized by US Surgeon General and national corrections agency for their positive impacts.

### MARISOL GARCIA, *Yale Prison Education Initiative*



Marisol Garcia is a first-year law student at Vermont School of Law and a College to Career Fellow at Yale Prison Education Initiative. She holds a B.A. in Public Policy and Law (2022) and a Master of Public Policy (2023) from Trinity College. She is a 2021 graduate of the Center for Prison Education program between Wesleyan University and Middlesex Community College. After serving a combined total of 22 years of incarceration, parole/probation, and community supervision, Marisol has made it a personal mission to help those she left behind the prison walls through community outreach and education. Her former mentorship in the Vera Institute of Justice Restoring Promise Initiative has helped fuel her continued passion for Restorative Justice. Her past hospice work has also fueled an interest in public health, public policy, and mass incarceration, which she has pursued at Yale University's SEICHE Center for Health and Justice, Yale's Center for Race, and Justice Collaboratory, and Bard College Public Health Fellowship

### CATHERINE OSTEN, *State Senator, 19th District*



Senator Cathy Osten has been serving as a State Senator representing the 19th District since 2012 and has been the State Senate's Deputy President Pro Tempore since 2016. Prior to embarking on a legislative career, Senator Osten served four years of active duty in the U.S. Army and then in Connecticut's Correction Department for more than two decades, first as a corrections officer and then as a lieutenant. In this role she experienced first-hand the issues surrounding Connecticut's prison system, public employees, pension disputes and women's rights in the workplace. She brings this experiential knowledge to her current roles as Co-Chair of the Connecticut General Assembly's Security Committee and Vice-Chair of the Public Safety and Security Committee.

### DENISE PALEY, *Connecticut State Advisory Board for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Board Member of NAMI Shoreline and Mother*



Denise Paley is a mental health and justice reform advocate. Her son's intersection between his first episode of psychosis and the criminal justice system activated her dedication to influence change to both prevent incarceration for people in a health crisis and better the existence for those living in incarceration. Denise has testified for laws to improve officer crisis response, prison conditions and mental health access in Connecticut.