

TESTIMONY BEFORE FINACE, GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

May 12, 2025 AT 10:30

SUPPORT FOR RESOLUTION 250393 TEMPORARY MODULAR JAIL

My name is Nancy Leazer. I worked at the Municipal Correctional Institution for 15 years—five years as the manager of the social services unit and ten as Superintendent of Corrections until we closed in 2009.

During my tenure, I found that effective corrections management required more than merely enforcing the rules; it demanded a profound commitment to understanding and addressing the root causes of criminal behavior.

Most of our inmates experienced abuse and neglect during childhood, were introduced to drugs and alcohol by age 10, and were living on the streets by age 13 or 14. This led to homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse, and medical and mental illnesses.

At MCI, we prioritized rehabilitation through programs offered by our community partners designed to tackle substance abuse, mental health issues, and practical training. These programs were lifelines for many inmates, offering them hope and a path to reintegrate into society.

Staff training at MCI was robust and even included training to handle mentally ill inmates. We recognized that meaningful rehabilitation starts not just with the inmates but with all the staff and especially Correctional Officers who interacted with them daily.

In 2009, our institution was closed despite my fervent opposition and the opposition of many others. I knew from experience the inmates would not receive the same level of care and access to services elsewhere, despite assurances to the contrary. Unfortunately, my concerns proved accurate and the population we served has continued to face mistreatment in other facilities. Effective management of this population is difficult, but it is possible through training, supervision and strong leadership.

I strongly support the temporary jail proposal currently under consideration. It is an excellent initiative to bring the inmates back home where they belong and can be properly managed while providing time to develop and train staff for the permanent facility. Importing experienced correctional officers from other institutions because of immediate staffing needs will only bring harmful practices into the new jail and must be avoided.

I urge you to adopt this resolution as not merely a practical first step but a moral imperative.

Thank you.