

NORFOLK COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

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Sheriff Patrick McDermott Testifies in Opposition to Prison Moratorium Bill

BOSTON, MA – Norfolk County Sheriff Patrick W. McDermott submitted written testimony in opposition to a Senate bill 1979, which would place a five year moratorium on any jail or prison construction or renovation. In his testimony, Sheriff McDermott said that the bill would undermine efforts by Massachusetts Sheriffs to break cycles of incarceration by hamstringing their ability to provide treatment in facilities that meet the changing needs of the justice-involved population.

“This legislation, if passed, is counterproductive and counterintuitive to the strides we as Sheriffs continue to make to provide a safe facility that focuses not on punishment but on opportunity to change and improve,” Sheriff McDermott testified. “In order to effectively continue to improve and innovate, we must have the ability to seek guidance and funding from the Commonwealth to build, renovate, and retrofit physical spaces to both meet the needs of our population and provide an environment that is conducive to therapeutic, medical, and educational success.”

In addition to housing justice-involved individuals at the Houses of Correction, Massachusetts Sheriff’s Offices provide an array of educational, treatment, self-help, and vocational programming designed to give justice-involved individuals the skills to make changes in their lives. At the Norfolk County Sheriff’s Office, 78 percent of the population participates in this programming, ranging from addiction support and parenting classes to college-level courses and skilled vocational certification.

Sheriff McDermott noted that these programs require continual investment in the physical spaces where they are held. “A 5 year moratorium has the real potential to significantly impede the progress we are making,” he testified. “Or worse, stop critical updates to facilities in order to meet the health and safety needs of the Justice-Involved Individuals in our care.”

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