

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee.....

I'm Sam Kinser, Chaplain for the Yellowstone County Sheriffs Office. I am not here because this is something that benefits me. I am not even a county employee. The county contracts my ministry for Chaplain services.

I've been involved in working with Corrections Officers for over six years now at the Yellowstone County Detention Facility. I head the Critical Incident Debriefing Team as well as work with the officers in "stress management". I see, on a daily basis, the intense stress that the officers are working under. I, personally, do not know of one individual who has made it to the 30 year requirement to retire. I do, however, know a number of them who have left there employment specifically because there was no real reason to "hang in there" past four or five years. I know of a Sgt., who the department had invested 8 years of training in, who left the Detention Facility to work at a state position. When asked if she had twenty year retirement would she have stayed she said "absolutely" but why would she keep going for 22 years here when she could leave and retire two years sooner and get paid better?

Another thing that I would like to touch on is that the opposition will/has said that it would be hard to distinguish who is a "Corrections Officer". They say that someone at a front desk could be called on to perform "occasionally" in that position and then claim that they are eligible for twenty year retirement. This is absolutely false. The union that governs the officers would never allow that.

Lastly, I would like to ask, how can we expect officers who work in an environment that puts them in harms way everyday to wait 30 years for retirement? These people are subjected to being spit on, assaulted, cursed at, etc. every minute of every work day. They are the ones who are responsible to keep every suicidal inmate alive. To make sure that every inmate has proper care, physically, mentally, and spiritually while keeping them safe and secure from each other, all the while, knowing that when or if they fail they will be held accountable. Have any of you ever been involved in a coroners inquiry after there has been a suicide? I have personally seen the consequences of these types of issues, that they have to deal with after cutting down someone who has hung himself in his cell. Believe me, they do a job that very, very few of us could handle.

Do we really want to require them to do this for 30 years before they can retire? I believe that is absurd.

Thank you!!