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Mr. Thom Tillis
Speaker of the NC House
NC General Assembly
Legislative Building
16 West Jones Street
Raleigh, NC 27601

Dear Speaker Tillis,

May I, at the very outset, apologize for the inordinate length of my letter, but its seriousness, I trust, will justify it.

I am writing you from my perspective as a retired United Methodist pastor with 40+ years as an active volunteer in the prisons of North Carolina.

In this setting, I served from 1972 until I chose to retire in 2005 on The Advisory Committee on Religious Services of the DOC, including Two Terms as Chairman.

One of the major accomplishments and continuing foci of this interdenominational/interfaith group was the development of the chaplaincy program for The Division of Prisons.

At its inception in 1972 there was only one state-funded chaplain attempting to minister to the then 12,000 inmates held in 90+ prisons from Murphy to Manteo - an utterly impossible responsibility.

At its height-in the 1990's working with the Chief of Chaplaincy Services, R. A. L. "Bud" Walker, we saw the number rise to nearly 90 and included the hiring of the first of several Islamic chaplains to serve the growing Muslim population, in keeping with "the spirit and letter" of The Constitution. While this did not approach the recommendation of The National Association of Correctional Chaplains of one chaplain for every 300 inmates, it was a start.

Since then, the number funded by the state has steadily declined to the point that at the beginning of 2011 there were only 50!

As a part of the budgetary process by the current General Assembly, that number was mandated to be cut in half. from 50 to 25, moving us further from the recommended ratio of the NACC, but more tragically, depriving the now 40,000 men and women in our adult prison of one of the proven change-agents at work in our prisons.

Accompanying this tragic step, was the totally-unrealistic exception that local clergy would be willing to step in and "fill the gap."

Based on my 4 decades of work inside our prisons and my knowledge of the momentous, multi-faceted, and time-consuming expectations of a correctional chaplain, this is totally unrealistic!

First of all, most active clergy have "all they can say Grace To" in serving their local congregations. I know; I was for 40 years a Local church pastor, and I had to struggle to "juggle my time between my congregation, my family, my own spiritual/emotional health and my service as a prison volunteer.

Second, a local clergy person is not equipped with the knowledge and skill effective prison chaplaincy requires and deserves.

Though I have served these many years in a number of prisons across our state, I would not dare assume that awesome responsibility. The sheer multiplicity of various faith groups now in our prisons (Not all inmates are or want to become Christians), along with the serious emotional, spiritual, and relational issues the majority of inmates bring to even the most competent chaplain makes such expectations at Travesty!

Therefore, I respectfully urge and implore you to use your position in The General Assembly "To resist and hopefully reverse this tragic mistake during the 2012 'short' – session"

If not corrected this single step will lead to the release of hundreds of inmates deprived of adequate, effective spiritual counsel and destined to return to prison! And each person who returns because of unmet spiritual/emotional/relational needs will have committed another crime, leaving one or more scarred victims. And in dollars and cents, it will cost the state \$30,000 minimum per year, per person! And very quickly any supposed savings by cuts in chaplains will "be eaten up," as well as leaving behind victims to be served and families, deprived of the potential "bread winner" who will turn to the state for direct financial assistance, as well as other services that require state taxpayer dollars!

Again, I apologize for the length of my letter, but I hope - and pray - you will grasp the dimensions of this "penny-wise but pound foolish" action, and use your efforts to reverse it and restore - if not increase - the number of urgently-needed, state-funded prison chaplains.

And if I can be of further help in this endeavor, please call on me.

Urgently,

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CC: Phil Berger, President Pro Tempore of the Senate
Governor Bev Perdue