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Contact: Katherine Yon, Communications Director

**THE DOWNSIDE OF SHIPPING WOMEN INMATES
TO CHICOPEE JAIL**
"Separate but Equal is Inherently Unequal"

BERKSHIRE COUNTY---Sheriff Candidate Alf Barbalunga said today he will work to bring back female inmates to Berkshire County, reversing an eight- year-old policy established by incumbent Tom Bowler.

In 2014, Bowler decided to relocate all female inmates to the Western Massachusetts Women's Regional Correctional Center in Chicopee, MA---a 2.5 hour round-trip from Berkshire County. However, Barbalunga maintains that "a separate but equal facility is inherently unequal." He believes, "the services and supports a jail provides to its inmates should not discriminate based on gender, and there is no compelling reason for removing inmates from the place where they currently live."

Sheriff Bowler conceded that while it solved logistical problems for him and his Executive Leadership Team, the arrangement was not ideal for women. Meg Bossong, Director of Sexual Assault Response and Health Education at Williams College and a former commissioner on the Berkshire County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls, is very concerned about this situation. She recalls a commission hearing with incarcerated women from the Chicopee facility that took place in 2019. During that hearing, the commissioners learned that "the housing of the women at the Western Massachusetts facility leads to a great deal of hardship for those women as well as their families in terms of family separations and people's ability to visit."

Additionally, Barbalunga notes that relocating inmates outside the county creates difficulties for attorneys needing to meet with their clients and for attorneys to schedule hearings with empathetic judges. The result is unequal treatment of female inmates--- despite research showing that women who are separated from visitations and connection to their family while in prison, suffer during incarceration and are more likely to have trouble when they are released. "It's like saying we have to rip people out of their home county to find appropriate behavioral health services," Barbalunga says. "The further away these people are relocated, the less often they will see family and friends. It's another form of deprivation added to the imprisonment itself." Barbalunga plans to immediately return women who find themselves incarcerated in another county back to the Berkshires to be close to their families and attorneys, while actually improving the services offered to them.

"We have excellent behavioral health, addictions, and employment support counseling in Berkshire County." Barbalunga says. "There is no reason why our jail has to take a back seat to any other facility in the state. We have talented, skilled support personnel right here in Berkshire County. I plan to create an award-winning facility right here at home."