The homicide of a visiting nurse inside a Willimantic halfway house in late October garnered headlines statewide, starting not only a critical conversation about the safety of healthcare workers in non-traditional settings but also what I hope will be a thorough review of our state’s criminal justice policy and procedures.

 Investigators say that 63-year-old Joyce Grayson went into the community-based halfway house—a re-entry home for sentenced inmates—just before 8 a.m. on Oct. 28, and was discovered in the basement by police later in the day after concerned family members urged investigators to look for her. The police chief in Willimantic has described the case as the worst he’s experienced in his more than three decades in law enforcement.

 Though he’s yet to be charged in the Willimantic crime, all eyes are on a resident of the halfway house—Michael Reese, who in 2007 was sentence to 25 years in prison, suspended after 17 years, after being found guilty of first-degree assault and first-degree sexual assault. Reese nearly killed a woman, who was stabbed in the neck several times. As described in recent news media reports detailing Reese’s criminal history, it was a violent attack in New Haven that represented “an indifference to human life.”

 Reese was released early from prison in December 2020, having served 14 years of the 17, and discharged from parole in April 2021. In March 2022, he officially was charged with probation violation after failing (multiple times) to attend required treatments. In January of this year, he was sent back to prison for six months but was released in March into a transitional facility in Uncasville for high-risk sex offenders. He landed in the Willimantic home in August.

 Though the Willimantic case involving Grayson is under investigation, a flood of early questions posed by advocates and citizens alike wonder how the longtime nurse ended up in what most would consider a highly dangerous situation. It’s the right question.

 At a recent capitol news conference, advocates for reform say nurses deserve more protection on jobs in the field, including knowing more about the offender for whom they are about to provide care. I agree, but I also think questions about existing criminal justice policies and procedures are in order, the least of which is why a dangerous individual such as Reese was on the streets to begin with. What sort of monitoring was Reese under? Details about the home itself—including who else was living there—must be reviewed, too.

 Reese is currently jailed on $1 million bond, (again) charged with probation violation during the immediate phase of the investigation into Grayson’s death.

 I can’t help but think Joyce Grayson’s death could have been avoided. Her family’s attorney, too, has raised concern about multiple system failures.

 We live in a state where a majority of state lawmakers focus more effort on releasing criminals from jail than aiding officers in their pursuant of criminals. Signature accomplishments from my Democratic colleagues include a robust early release system for prisoners, and another that erases criminal records for a wide variety of offenses—many of them serious crimes. To boot, closing all prisons is a stated goal of our lieutenant governor.

 I’m among those who contend those policy decisions, and many others, have tipped the scales of justice too far in one direction. Too often, victims are an afterthought. More balance is needed, and I can only hope this tragedy in Willimantic will open more eyes in the legislature toward that reality.

**Rep. Vincent Candelora  
House Republican Leader**

**86thDistrict**

**North Branford, Durham, East Haven, Guilford**