



Department of Justice

STATEMENT

OF

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BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CORRECTIONS AND REHABILITATION
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
UNITED STATES SENATE

CONCERNING

OVERSIGHT OF FEDERAL ASSISTANCE FOR PRISONER REHABILITATION
AND REENTRY IN OUR STATES

PRESENTED ON

SEPTEMBER 21, 2006

TESTIMONY FOR REGINA B. SCHOFIELD
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SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CORRECTIONS AND REHABILITATION
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Mr. Chairman, Senator Durbin, and Members of the Subcommittee, I am Regina B. Schofield, Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Justice Programs. I am pleased to be here this afternoon on behalf of the Attorney General, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), and the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) to discuss the Department's efforts to aid state and local reentry initiatives.

Most offenders, including the most violent offenders, will eventually return to their communities. Public safety is affected by their return. A study from OJP's Bureau of Justice Statistics found that more than two-thirds of all released offenders were rearrested within three years. So, of the 650,000 people who are released from prison annually, over 400,000 are likely to be rearrested.

Between the harm caused by their original crimes, the injuries inflicted by their new offenses, and the collective damage they do to both their neighborhoods and their communities, the path of destruction recidivists leave is wide and long. In addition to the obvious threat to public safety, this cycle of crime and imprisonment drains scarce community resources from other essential services.

The issue of prisoner reentry has been of great concern to this Administration since early in President Bush's first term. In 2002, the Department of Justice, in an unprecedented partnership with other federal agencies, including two Departments represented here on this

panel, the Departments of Labor and Health and Human Services, launched *Going Home: the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative, or "SVORI."* As the name implies, this initiative has focused on those offenders considered the greatest potential risk to their communities.

Under SVORI, we have awarded more than \$120 million to 69 grantees, covering all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the Virgin Islands. These grants helped to support states and communities as they developed and implemented their own reentry strategies. Although the strategies were designed by states and communities to meet their own specific needs, they all share a three-pronged approach that covers every stage of the reentry process. First, while participating offenders are still incarcerated, reentry partners assess their needs, their skills, and the risk they pose to public safety, and develop formal reentry plans. Second, as soon as these offenders are released, they are closely supervised, often with the requirement that they report to a judge or corrections officer, and receive treatment and training. Finally, a network of public and private agencies provides long-term support as the offenders reintegrate.

The SVORI reentry plans also include planning and participation by faith-based and community organizations, neighborhood residents, and local police, and close consultation with state and local government officials, corrections staff, probation and parole officers, treatment providers, and others to make sure that all reentry efforts are comprehensive and coordinated. Everyone works together so that no ex-offender falls through the cracks.

The feedback to date has been very encouraging. We have completed the first phase of a two-phase, multi-year evaluation of the SVORI programs. The evaluation shows that these programs have been successful in bridging the gaps in existing state and local efforts. They are

providing much-needed transition services, such as counseling, mentoring, and job training. And they are closely coordinating pre-release and post-release services.

The next phase of the evaluation is a four-year impact study that will measure program outcomes. It will tell us what impact SVORI programs have had on recidivism, and whether they are cost-effective in helping ex-offenders reenter their communities. More information from the SVORI evaluation is available on the Web at www.svori-evaluation.org. We will continue to share findings from the evaluation as they become available.

The SVORI grants expired this year, but we are taking what we have learned from those programs and applying it to the President's Prisoner Reentry Initiative, or PRI. The President's initiative is a federal partnership that is intended to help ex-offenders find and keep employment, obtain transitional housing, and receive mentoring. Its scope is different from SVORI in that PRI focuses on assisting non-violent ex-offenders. It also harnesses the resources and experience of faith-based and community organizations in helping returning inmates contribute to society.

In Fiscal Years 2005 and 2006, we awarded \$12.9 million to states for pre-release planning and services for non-violent offenders, age 18 and over. Our focus on these grants is on enhancing the capacity of criminal justice agencies to assess offender links to services and to ensure accountability through supervision. We are also supporting training and technical assistance based on the needs of the grant sites, and we are dedicating resources to look at issues faced by returning offenders who are addicted to methamphetamines.

These grants were designed to complement the Department of Labor's portion of the initiative, under which 30 community and faith-based organizations in 20 states received awards

to provide post-release services such as mentoring, employment assistance, and housing assistance.

Reentry also plays a pivotal role in our efforts to fight gangs. Under the Attorney General's six-site comprehensive anti-gang initiative, the Department is making \$500,000 available to each community to create mentor-based reentry assistance programs. Those programs will provide transitional housing, job readiness and placement assistance, and substance abuse and mental health treatment to returning prisoners who are gang members or who are at risk of gang involvement.

We are addressing reentry issues through other channels as well. We are working with the International Association of Chiefs of Police on increasing the role of law enforcement in reentry. We are working with the Urban Institute and John Jay College to address issues faced by offenders reentering the community from local, regional and rural jails. In partnership with the Reentry Policy Council of the Council of State Governments, we are looking at reentry issues related to housing, assessment, and financial obligations. A project with the National Association of Counties is analyzing the issues related to the return of mentally ill offenders to communities. In addition, we are improving ways to ensure that reentering sex offenders do not threaten the public, including exploring address verification technologies and electronic surveillance. As the Subcommittee requested, I am submitting for the record detailed information on the programs I have described today and some of our other reentry-related activities.

The President, the Attorney General, and I all believe that successfully reintegrating offenders back into their communities is one of the most pressing criminal justice issues facing

our nation. State and local governments have demonstrated that thoughtful policies and programs can be developed to address this issue. The federal partners, including the Department of Justice, are committed to doing all we can to continue to support this good work.

We appreciate the interest you and your colleagues have shown in this critical public safety issue. I welcome the opportunity to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.