

Before the
Subcommittee on the Federal Workforce,
Postal Service and the District of Columbia

Hearing on
University of the District of Columbia/Rivers Correctional Institute
Program
Winton, North Carolina



UNIVERSITY OF
THE DISTRICT
OF COLUMBIA

==

Testimony of Stanley Jackson, Acting President
University of the District of Columbia

October 16, 2007

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE FEDERAL
WORKFORCE, POSTAL SERVICE AND THE DISTRICT OF
COLUMBIA**

University of the District of Columbia/Rivers Correctional Institute Program

October 16, 2007

*Testimony of Stanley Jackson, Acting President,
University of the District of Columbia*

Good morning Chairman Davis and other members of the subcommittee. I am Stanley Jackson, Acting President of the University of the District of Columbia. I am honored to appear before you today to speak to the Subcommittee of Federal Workforce, the Postal Service and the District of Columbia concerning the University of the District of Columbia's efforts to assist the transition of ex-offenders back into the community. The University has an extensive history of helping ex-offenders re-enter society, and we are pleased to have been asked to share our views with this Subcommittee.

As you have heard and read, when ex-offenders return to the District of Columbia, they often return to the same dysfunctional social environments that led them to commit crimes in the first place. Many of these individuals often lack the necessary education and skills to obtain gainful employment. Those that have received the education and/or skills training and are able to compete often face discrimination. Typically they find that their criminal records make it harder for them to obtain employment.

A Washington Post article dated August 10, 2007 cited sobering statistics supporting this assertion. The article indicated that approximately 2,000 prisoners come back to the District every year -- an average of five every day. As many as 60,000 D.C. residents -- one in ten -- are felons. There are 15,000 of the returning felons who are under court supervision.

These ex-offenders arrive at the homes of relatives, at halfway houses and shelters. One-third end up homeless or close to it. Seven out of ten have or have once had substance abuse problems. Half of these ex-offenders do not have high school diplomas. They tend to be ostracized and avoided by potential employers, landlords and even family members.

The picture facing these ex-offenders is grim. Without the proper training and educational support that will lead to gainful employment, many of them will be re-arrested within three years of release.

Looking Back

The University, through our workforce development programs, has a long history of working with inmates and ex-offenders to assist with their transition back into society.

Beginning in 1976, The UDC Lorton Vo-Tech Programs consisted of an array of course offerings (many leading to entry-level apprenticeship employment) to District residents who were confined to the DC Department of Corrections Lorton facilities in Lorton, Virginia.

On June 30, 2001 the UDC Lorton Vo-Tech programs began phasing out after many years of vocational and skills development training due to a Federal mandate to close the facility and transfer residents to Federal facilities across the United States.

Vocational training was offered in the areas of:

- Automotive Technician
- Barber Science
- Brick Masonry
- Carpentry
- Cosmetology
- Culinary Arts
- Dentistry Technician
- Facility Maintenance
- Furniture Repair/Maintenance
- Garment Manufacturing
- Landscaping
- Plumbing
- Printing and Graphic Arts
- Skills Development/Job Readiness
- Tags Manufacturing
- Woodwork

Since August of 2001, The University has worked indirectly with many ex-offenders through our Office of Apprenticeship, Technical and Industrial Trades and has served as the contact unit for individuals who were previously incarcerated at the Lorton complex and either started or completed programming in the Voc-Tech programs. Many of the individuals the University has served during this time requested our assistance and support in the following areas:

- Verification of training
- Copies of completion certificate
- Request continuum of training
- Request refresher training
- Request placement assistance

Unfortunately, due to the limited (or at times, no) resources, there was no formal infrastructure in place to house/archive records for these individuals.

Today's Efforts

Recently, we have renewed and reenergized our efforts to assist the transition of ex-offenders back into their DC communities. We are active team members on the District of Columbia "Just Us" - Transition from Prison to Community (TPC) Initiative.

The TPC model identifies and promotes adoption of evidence-based best practices that states should implement in the following stages of the transition process:

- Assessing and classifying new prison inmate
- Developing and implementing transition plans for each inmate
- Releasing offenders from prison
- Providing community supervision and services
- Responding to violation of release conditions
- Discharging successful offenders from supervision

Specifically, the University will focus on the ways in which it is possible to match DC offenders with education. We are very interested in working on the educational component of reentry and training.

Additionally, in June of this year, the University entered into a partnership with the Justice Grants Administration, the GEO Group at Rivers Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA) and the Criminal Justice Council (CJC) to implement the University of the District of Columbia/Rivers Correctional Institute Reentry Initiative Pilot (DCRIP) Program. This program is specifically focused on occupational skills enhancement, and educational opportunities for ex-offenders to the District of Columbia.

This is a pilot program with the purpose of establishing a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship among the parties and to set forth the relative responsibilities of the parties insofar as they relate to the provision of services to the returning Ex-Offenders to the District of Columbia.

The DCRIP Program will provide pre-release occupational and literacy assessments, skills enhancement exercises and job readiness training to soon-to-be-released offenders serving at the Rivers Correctional Institute and expected to return to Washington, DC. These continuous services will enable the offender, upon release, to move directly into a certifiable occupational training program, gain meaningful employability skills and prepare them to fulfill their responsibilities of becoming gainfully employed and self-sufficient.

The University, in cooperation with American College Testing, Inc. (ACT) Learning Centers and guided by the Department of Labor Industry Standards, has developed a comprehensive pre-release program that will enable the returning offender to acquire the

requisite skills and attitudes for today's job market so that with the proper occupational training, they may enter the job market in a reasonable amount of time following release. Acquiring a meaningful job and receiving a livable wage in a timely manner will likely reduce the recidivism rate among returning offenders.

Occupational assessment is an effective, measurable and viable approach that will result in the focus and refinement of the University's individually customized efforts to meet the goals and objectives of skills enhancement for this special needs population. In order to do this we have begun to build and maintain a robust continuum of workforce responsive assessment tools, certification programs, academic courses and degree programs along with support services networks that allow ex-offenders to enter and/or reenter the continuum at various points to improve their employment options.

Currently, there are 34 participants in The DCRIP. Initially, there were 38 participants; however one was released prior to completion of the program and three participants dropped out of the program.

There is a Project Director and Program Facilitator assigned to this project. They travel to Rivers once a month and spend two days each month at the correctional facility. While there, they conduct skills assessments and training and provide core skills training workshops for the participants. The Project Director will collaborate with the Rivers' Education Director to determine each participant's Individual Development Plan (IDP). The DCRIP partners will seek to establish a year-long schedule that allows the maximum number of clients to participate in the program beyond the initial 40 pilot participants for 2007. All information on the placement activities of these participants will be documented, tracked and reported to the other partnering agencies as they are collected.

Additionally, the Project Director will establish relationships with employers that are willing to hire these qualified participants. One facet of the program is to educate employers about the benefits of the Bonding Programs that protect their businesses from liability, the positive social economic impact of hiring the participants in this program and the Tax breaks that are available for their participation. The program, in partnership with employers, will determine whether or not graduates from the DCRIP meet their "new hire" requirements, and whether or not they are in a position to hire graduates as Interns or permanent employees.

Future Activities

The University, the only public land grant institution in the nation's capital, became the sole fiscal agent for the DC Tech Prep Consortium and Community Outreach and Extension Services Office of Apprenticeship Technical and Industrial Trades (OES/OATIT), with primary responsibility for leadership and oversight of the Tech Prep Education Program in 2007.

The enactment of the School to Work Opportunities Act of 1994 enshrined in Federal law the idea that all students should be prepared for both college and career. Under Perkins IV all Career Technical Education (CTE) programs should constitute Tech Prep Education programs from the standpoint of policy and practice.

One of the critical targets addressed under Perkins is special populations, including ex-offenders. DC Standards of Service for Students with Special Needs were enacted to ensure that individuals who are members of special populations are provided with full and equal access to CTE programs, services and activities, and are successfully prepared for postsecondary education and high skills, high wage, and high demand careers. The District of Columbia has adopted comprehensive DC State Standards of Service for students with special needs and the University, as a current CTE provider accepts and abides by the State Standards as a precondition of the receipt of Perkins funds.

The University, not only as a requirement of Perkins and the State Operated Career and Technical Education (SOCTE), but also as a part of its continuing history of service to the ex-offender community includes ex-offenders within the classification of special populations. Under Perkins IV funds for CTE programs and services for inmates in State-operated correctional institutions for FY 2008 includes plans for support for a prison-to-school-college-or apprenticeship transition program at Oak Hill Youth Correctional Facility, operated in partnership with the University and Justice Assistance Grants for the District of Columbia (JAG-DC).

Recommendations & Conclusion

There is a dire need for full participation, strong coordination and funding assistance from The Department of Employment Services (DOES), The Department of Health and Human Services (DHS) and Community Based Organizations such as Marshal Heights Community Development Organization (MHCDO) and United Planning Organization (UPO) as service providers. With the assistance of these partners, we can create opportunities for ex-offenders to utilize UDC Workforce Transition Centers that are co-located in public agencies in Wards 5, 7 and 8 and that combine assessment, certificates and degree programs along with literacy centers and student support assistance.

The mandate has become crystallized in the past few years. Returning ex-offenders to the District of Columbia must become more literate, more educated, and more skilled in order to benefit from the strong regional economy. Welfare-to-Work and Way-to-Work programs helped more individuals than ever before find employment, but labor market challenges have moved to another level. The focus now must be on ensuring that re-integrating residents can remain in employment once secured, and advance through additional career opportunities based on more advanced skill sets acquired and educating employers to the benefits of hiring through this reservoir of talent.

Leadership of various local agencies and organizations responsible for workforce, economic, and education policy and programs must be willing to work together, and

develop common objectives and strategic plans to effect real, systemic change, including a willingness to pool financial resources when necessary. It is important to get economic, workforce, and education and training organizations “on the same page” including the provision of a common language, and understanding of basic roles, responsibilities, and programs. The sustainable funding for training must come from WIA (Workforce Investment Act) Individual Training Accounts (ITA) and TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) funds. Commitment of certain funding for this effort should help improve workforce services for ex-offenders who are eligible and have dependent children. These agencies provide funds for training and provide “wraparound” services to help program participants with child care and transportation issues.

Helping to transition ex-offenders into meaningful employment and self-sufficient wages has received a lot of energy and attention in recent years. There are numerous examples of noteworthy programs and practices. Common traits of training for the incarcerated include literacy, basic and soft skills, career exploration, job searching, and job coaching. Unfortunately, none of these programs focus on identifying sustainable funding for returning ex-offenders such as those housed through the D.C. correctional system. Partnering with DOES and DHS and this influential body would be a major part of the solution to identifying those funds.

The University of the District of Columbia continues to look at areas whereby we can better serve our ex-offenders clientele with a user-friendly system, confidentiality, and a strong network with other agencies to ensure that we serve the whole individual as he or she continues to pursue educational advancement.

I thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My staff and I are available to answer any questions that you may have.