

Let me begin by thanking the members of the Subcommittee on the Federal Workplace, Postal Service, and the District of Columbia for giving me the opportunity to present my assessment of transitional employment services and programs for District of Columbia ex-offenders.

My name is Charles Jones. I am the Program Director of the Office of Project Empowerment of the D.C. Department of Employment Services. My office currently oversees the Transitional Employment Program, also known as TEP, an initiative that is helping District residents, many of whom are ex-offenders, rebuild their lives and become productive citizens. Prior to this, I served as the Director of the Project Empowerment Plus program, which, like the Transitional Employment Program, addressed the lack of social and economic anchors available to at-risk youth and ex-offenders transitioning from incarceration to becoming law-abiding, contributing members of society.

To date, the Office of Project Empowerment has assisted 1039 ex-offenders to secure employment. Of the 724 active ex-offenders in the Project Empowerment program, 420 are currently employed; the others are involved in work-related activities.

Our program is demanding. To ensure a successful transition from prison to payroll, ex-offenders served by our program undergo an aggressive and comprehensive process that incorporates life skills and educational and vocational training, as well as work experience, job placement, and job retention assistance. All participants are required to attend an **Orientation Module** to get an overview of the program's expectations as well as a description of the services offered. Our staff works with the ex-offender to identify and analyze his or her skills sets, abilities, and interests during a **Case Management and Pre-Employment Assessment**. This information is used to develop a tailored employment plan for each ex-offender. Once an employment plan has been developed, the ex-offender is ready for our **Job Readiness component**, an intensive four-week pre-employment module that helps him or her acquire both professional and life skills that are

necessary to thrive in today's workforce. We focus on promptness, planning, professional demeanor, proper diction and other work ethic areas. These professional workshops are facilitated by business managers and range from videotaped mock interviews to occupational skills training sessions and mobile job coaching.

Following the Job Readiness instruction, most ex-offenders are placed at subsidized, or transitional worksites. Program Job Coaches conduct worksite visits to assess whether supplementary assistance may be necessary. Through this **Job Coaching** approach, our staff is better able to monitor progress, offer support to both the participant and employer, and ensure continued success of the employer-employee partnership. In many cases, vocational education, adult education classes, or occupational skills training are offered to the ex-offender to further enhance educational achievement or employment skills.

The Department of Employment Services' Office of Project Empowerment has achieved a great deal of success in the face of daunting challenges. Nevertheless, the journey toward success for the ex-offender is never easy. Immediately upon release, most ex-offenders face the very real obstacle of navigating a new environment, complicated by significant economic, technological, and social changes. Just obtaining basic necessities, such as valid identification, access to healthcare, employment, appropriate work clothing, and housing can be quite overwhelming. Yet all are essential for leading functional lives and sustaining economic self-sufficiency.

If ex-offenders do not receive systemic rehabilitation services that lead to social reintegration, employment, education, and housing, then communities will be left vulnerable to the costs and violence of recidivist criminal activity. A major factor in this challenge is adequate funding. Currently, the prison system is not doing enough to prepare ex-offenders for survival in the outside world. Consequently, many ex-offenders are left underemployed or jobless, homeless and hopeless, even after going through re-entry programs. Ultimately, they are recycled back into the prison system, becoming repeat offenders rather than productive citizens.

We believe that prisons are positioned to successfully take on these challenges. Prior to release, ex-offenders must be afforded access to the community and allowed access to prospective employers. They must be afforded simulated workplace scenarios and mock interviews to increase workplace familiarity. They must be provided with intensive life skills development, relationship building, anger management, and parenting skills. Public or privately-funded ex-offender re-entry programs should provide a continuation of those services, as well as access to an expanded network of community partnerships, that provide support in such areas as education, health, transportation, clothing, and access to academic financial aid or entrepreneurial assistance. These types of programs and services will give the ex-offender an excellent chance at successful community reintegration.

Numerous research studies have suggested that pre-release re-entry programs that involve transitional community services such as job training, job placement, and job retention services, as well as supportive services such as substance abuse treatment and housing assistance, discourage recidivism and promote community reintegration. I am convinced of this. Absent a comprehensive, systematic, and proven process to comprehensively address the needs of the ex-offender population - which must begin prior to an ex-offender's release from prison - the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area must be prepared to continue to deal with the human and financial costs of recidivism and an ongoing threat to public safety.

Congresswoman Holmes-Norton and members of the Subcommittee on the Federal Workplace, Postal Service, and the District of Columbia, it has been an honor to appear before you today as an advocate for ex-offenders who want to lead productive lives and provide for their families. I am pleased to answer any questions you may have at this time.