



**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF GEORGE T. MCDONALD  
FOUNDER & PRESIDENT, THE DOE FUND, INC.  
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON CRIME, TERRORISM AND HOMELAND SECURITY  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY  
"SECOND CHANCE ACT OF 2007"  
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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on a matter of significant importance to our Nation. As Founder and President of The Doe Fund, the New York based non-profit that operates the Ready, Willing & Able residential paid work program, I have had the privilege of watching thousands of men break lifelong patterns of crime, homelessness and substance abuse to become productive, law-abiding, tax-paying citizens and fathers to their children.

In the early 1980's, when I first started working with people our society had given up on – homeless, drug-addicted ex-offenders – I heard from their mouths that what they really wanted was a hand-up, not a handout. They wanted the opportunity to go to work, to lift themselves out of poverty, to escape destructive cycles and to rejoin mainstream society. When I handed them a sandwich they thanked me, but asked for something more – something I heard over and over again – "A room and a job to pay for it. A room and a job to pay for it."

The Ready, Willing & Able program fulfills that request. It was the first program of its kind to go beyond immediate emergency needs...to believe in the potential of even the most downtrodden among us to seize an opportunity and succeed.

I recruited the first Ready, Willing & Able program participants from the floor of Grand Central Terminal. That is where they had landed after cycling in and out of homeless shelters and prisons. Together we entered into a contract in which they promised to give up drugs and go to work and The Doe Fund, in return, promised that Ready, Willing & Able (RWA) would be there to support and open doors for them.

From that first handful of men and our first facility in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn we have grown to serve over 1,000 people a day, in six facilities and three states. Our participants come to us, no longer off the floor of Grand Central Terminal, but often straight from our prisons. They represent the largest and costliest crisis – both financially and in wasted human lives – our society has yet to face – criminal recidivism.

Each year, 660,000 individuals are released from prison. Two-thirds go back within three years. Studies have shown over and over again that the chief factor influencing their recidivism is the ability to find quality employment. It is therefore no surprise that Ready, Willing & Able's work-based approach has had such extraordinary success in helping this population permanently escape the revolving door of incarceration.

As part of our renowned and highly visible community improvement street cleaning project, we put the "Men in Blue" (as we call them because of the bright blue uniforms they wear) to work cleaning over 150 miles of city streets every day. They earn above minimum wage and immediately begin to develop the work ethic and dignity that comes from an honest day's work.

The sweeping, bagging of garbage, graffiti removal, snow shoveling and other street sanitation services they perform have improved the quality of life in the cities where we operate and made our participants beloved and sought after additions to every neighborhood. Because they do this hard and humble work with diligence and good cheer, they have won the support of more than 45,000 individuals who not only send financial contributions, but notes explaining how much they have come to rely on our participants and – believe it or not – feel safer because of their presence. After 9 months in our program we help them find full-time private sector jobs and get ready to exchange their blue uniforms for suits and ties, chef's hats and doorman uniforms.

When in 2001, Kings County (New York) District Attorney Charles Hynes asked us to launch a pilot "day" program serving parolees who had housing, but needed the educational, vocational, substance abuse and, most importantly, paid work that RWA offered, we didn't hesitate.

Beginning with 30 men, our day program has grown to serve over 200. All put on our signature bright blue uniforms and go out every day to clean our city. In an unassuming and humble way, they accomplish the monumental task of reversing prejudices and changing the perception of formerly incarcerated people.

Last year, building on our extraordinary success in reducing recidivism by helping parolees rejoin the workforce, we secured additional funding through the Department of Justice to help us expand our program to serve parolees by adding a residential component to the services we were already providing. Today, RWA–Stuyvesant, located in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, is one of the most comprehensive

residential, work-based models serving this population. It focuses on the critical moment when an inmate is about to be released and is looking to make a positive change in his life. Recruitment begins before he is even released and literally offers him a chance to walk out the prison door and onto one of our vans that will transport him to his new transitional home.

For 9 – 12 months he lives in a safe, drug-free shared apartment, is paid above minimum wage to work in our community improvement project, receives comprehensive social, services and reports to a Parole Officer assigned specifically to participants in RWA-Stuyvesant. Immediately, he becomes a productive, law-abiding member of the community and an example of what is possible when meaningful opportunity is provided and seized.

Last year, I was asked by Chauncey Parker, then Director of the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, to assemble a committee to formulate recommendations that would enhance employment opportunities for job seekers with criminal records. I had the honor of working, for over a year, with brilliant and dedicated experts to create The Independent Committee on Reentry and Employment's Report and Recommendations to New York State on Enhancing Employment Opportunities for Formerly Incarcerated People. I am proud of the recommendations we put forth in this report and could include findings and statistics from it in this testimony, but instead, I would like to share the stories of some of our program graduates with you.

Anthony Malpica came to Ready, Willing & Able with over 50 convictions for Breaking and Entering. During his three decade long addiction to heroin he had known two homes: a prison cell and a cardboard box in an abandoned lot in Spanish Harlem that he called "Cardboard Co-op City." Upon his last release, he heard about RWA at a Narcotics Anonymous meeting. Putting on our blue uniform and sweeping the streets of New York was Anthony's first legitimate job at the age of 45. When it came time for him to look for permanent employment, he applied for a job as – of all things – a locksmith apprentice. As he says, "I had broken many locks to rob, but I had never imagined myself fixing them." Today, Anthony has been drug-free for 8 years. He is married and lives in his own home. He is no longer a locksmith apprentice, but a certified, bonded locksmith.

José Carrero was 19 when he was sentenced under New York's Rockefeller Drug laws. He was 39 when he came out. While inside, he stabbed another inmate and spent a total of 5 years in solitary confinement. There, "in the box" as inmates call it, he had an awakening and decided to change his life.

Upon release, he came to our program, put on a blue uniform and pushed a bucket for a year. He remembers that the things that kept him motivated, when he thought about giving up, were the paycheck and the passersby who patted him on the back and thanked him for the job he was doing. He was used to inspiring fear in people, but never smiles or gratitude.

The greatest sense of gratitude for his transformation, however, comes from his two children. In the past, his son was told, "You're no good. You will be just like your father." Today José, Jr. sees his father as a role model and appreciates being compared to him.

José graduated from our program with a job as a dialysis technician. He likes to say that while he once stabbed people to hurt them, today he does it to save their lives.

There are thousands of success stories like Anthony's and José's, and through the help of programs like The Doe Fund's there can be more. Enacting this bill is a start toward assembling the formula – of which work opportunities are the key – to ensuring their success and that of the thousands of formerly incarcerated individuals who seek to re-enter society and the workforce.

Ready, Willing & Able has found the way to replace the revolving door of criminal recidivism with the best front door in America – one that a formerly incarcerated person can walk through with little more than the desire to work hard and rebuild his life and walk out of, a year later, with his sobriety, a permanent job and his own apartment.

In my testimony to this Subcommittee of the United States Congress, I cannot help but think – "what could be more fundamentally American than enacting legislation like this that will extend the opportunity of hard work and personal responsibility to people striving to become tax-paying, law abiding citizens?"