

**STATEMENT OF JASPER ORMOND,  
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BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA,  
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM,  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**JULY 20, 2001**

Good morning, Chairwoman Morella, Congresswoman Norton, and Members of the Subcommittee. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you on behalf of the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency, or CSOSA, to discuss the opportunities and challenges of offender reentry in the District of Columbia. We believe that offender reintegration, or reentry, is one of the most important issues facing the criminal justice system today, and we appreciate the Subcommittee's interest in this important issue.

Much attention has been given to the role of halfway houses in reentry programming and the need to expand halfway house capacity in the District. While halfway houses are indeed a critical element of an effective reentry system, I would like to concentrate my remarks on the system as a whole. Offenders face many challenges in attempting to establish law-abiding, productive lives. The programs and services that constitute reentry programming should respond to those challenges in a coordinated, systematic manner. The totality of needs that the individual offender brings to his or her reentry should be met with a coordinated system of responses.

What are those needs? We know that most of the offenders returning to the District are undereducated and underskilled. They have a history of drug abuse that probably was not addressed in prison. They have an average of 9.2 prior arrests and 4.5 prior convictions. One in five has a prior violent offense. While 78 percent are single, over half report that they have children. Over 40 percent have nowhere stable to go after they leave prison. Often, they have lost contact with family and friends, and while almost all intend to return to the area they lived in before incarceration, most will recognize few, if any, of the faces they see when they get there.

For offenders who have built their lives around substance abuse and crime, and who have spent years away from society, it is difficult to gain the confidence that their lives can be different. Our first priority in discussing reentry is, of course, public safety: we intend to reduce recidivism and prevent crime. But our strategy must also include the related priority of providing meaningful opportunity and support for ex-offenders.

CSOSA supervises over 5,500 parolees. Our total caseload includes active, monitored, and warrant status cases. Of the total, 3,342 are parolees on active supervision status. The average period of supervision is five years. We have a caseload in almost every Police Service Area in the District. We believe that close supervision and attention to individual needs and behavior are critical to the parolee's success in establishing a drug- and crime-free life. Without that kind of attention, we are setting returning offenders up for failure, which is very costly to all of us.

It's fair to say that many inmates leave prison with little more than the hope that they can make better choices than they have in the past. Reentry is about giving ex-offenders something to choose and helping them internalize the dynamics of choice.

Community supervision provides external control and external accountability. An officer is looking over the offender's shoulder, keeping tabs on him or her, enforcing the conditions and requirements of release. We believe that by adhering to these external controls, the offender learns to exercise internal control over his or her behavior. By practicing accountability to others, the offender learns accountability to his or her self.

Of course, the ideas of "control" and "accountability" are more meaningful if the offender pays a real price for breaking the rules. When the controls are external, the price is clear: loss of freedom. When the controls are internal, the price is harder to measure. One objective of reentry programming is to provide the offender with an opportunity to gain something that he or she wants to keep. That "something" varies from person to person. It may be a close relationship, the respect and affection of one's children, a career, a house, or good health. Whatever it is, the individual must value it enough to structure his or her life around maintaining it, and it must be compatible with a law-abiding lifestyle. We are striving to establish programming that provides ex-offenders with the opportunity to define and work for these types of rewards. We cannot expect that ex-offenders will develop strong internal behavioral controls unless they believe those kinds of real benefits are possible.

CSOSA has established a three-phased reentry structure. The initial **transition phase** occurs in the halfway house and involves risk and needs assessment, release planning, and intensive drug testing. Fourteen of our Community Supervision Officers, or CSOs, are assigned to work with halfway house residents and perform this assessment and case planning function in the Transitional Interventions for Parole Supervision, or TIPS, program. This phase lasts from 30 to 90 days, depending on the issues facing the offender. During this time, the offender learns what will be expected of him or her during community supervision, what resources are available to help, and what sanctions will be imposed for non-compliance. At this point, the offender is on pre-parole status and can be returned to prison if he or she is not ready for release.

If the offender does not reside in a halfway house prior to release, the assessment and case planning function occurs during the early weeks of his or her supervision. The offender's CSO completes the risk assessment, initiates drug testing, and refers the

offender for substance abuse, mental health, educational, or other assessments as appropriate.

During the second phase, **reintegration**, the offender works intensively with his or her CSO to put in place the basic structures of a responsible lifestyle: a stable residence, employment, and positive relationships. This reintegration phase lasts a minimum of six months, and usually longer.

For many offenders, this amounts to building a life almost from scratch. Research has demonstrated that the moment of release and the first few weeks thereafter are crucial for success. If the offender feels secure and supported at this point, his or her chances for success increase. It is in this phase that the need for community partnership and acceptance most clearly emerges. It is critical that CSOSA establish partnerships with employers to develop job skills that can lead to career opportunities for ex-offenders. Similar partnerships with property managers are equally important to ensure an adequate supply of affordable, stable housing. Health care must also be accessible for this population. Literacy training is also critical.

Equally important, police officers must partner with community supervision officers to reinforce accountability. For many offenders, the stress of this transition will contribute to a relapse into substance abuse, and the reentry system must be prepared to respond appropriately. All of this must occur within the context of supervision and must take into account the probability of false starts and technical violations. During this time, swift and appropriate sanctions are essential to respond to non-compliance.

One of our major budget initiatives for FY 2002, a Reentry and Sanctions Center, will be critical to both the transition phase and the reintegration phase. The Center will provide residential placements for both the initial assessment that is so critical to reentry planning and the residential sanctions that are critical to preventing recidivism. The Reentry and Sanctions Center will also supplement halfway house capacity by providing space for both pre-parole and sanctions placements. These placements are vital to our approach to reentry.

The final phase is **relapse prevention and restitution**. During the remainder of his or her term of supervision, the ex-offender maintains and enhances the structures that were established during the reintegration phase. Relationships are critical to this phase, which is very much about helping the ex-offender sustain momentum and develop internal goals that go beyond staying out of prison. The best source of productive relationships is the community: churches can provide social contact and connection to the community. Mentors can provide guidance and friendship. Non-profit organizations can provide opportunities for community service as part of restitution. The offender can find ongoing support in community-based groups such as Narcotics Anonymous. All of these entities can work with the Agency to provide the offender with an opportunity for a meaningful, productive life that does not revolve around drugs and crime.

CSOSA has made significant progress in developing these kinds of partnerships, but much work remains to be done. We have developed 27 agreements with public and non-profit agencies for community service. We have implemented a wide-ranging partnership with the Metropolitan Police Department. We are active in over 30 Police Service Areas and intend to reach every service area by the end of the year. We have trained over 3,000 MPD officers in our partnership philosophy. We are establishing a network of Learning Labs to provide educational and vocational services. We are working with a coalition of churches and non-profit organizations to develop job opportunities. In every way possible, we are working to implement our model and make a coordinated system of reentry services a reality in the District. We are doing this in the communities where offenders live. It is critical to our strategy that our officers work in the field, not in centralized downtown offices. By the end of this fiscal year, we will have six field offices, each of which is strategically located in an area with a high concentration of ex-offenders.

We believe that effective supervision practices enhance public safety and promote offender accountability. To that end, we have developed a system of graduated sanctions for non-compliance. These sanctions range from increased drug testing, to placement in a treatment or anti-criminality sanctions group, to residential placement for up to 90 days. This residential sanction program, Halfway Back, involves a system of vendors who provide residential placement and assessment programming. The offender can be removed from the circumstances influencing his or her non-compliant behavior while the CSO and treatment staff plan a system of interventions to prevent the behavior from continuing.

Our substance abuse treatment system includes ten local providers who will serve more than 1,200 probationers and parolees this year. Treatment includes both residential and outpatient programs, and all of our treatment is tied to supervision and sanctions. All offenders entering treatment sign an Accountability Contract which defines the consequences of violating the rules of the program. Our contractors are required to notify us in a timely manner if an offender disrupts the program, leaves, tests positive, or shows non-compliance in any other way. These behaviors become a supervision issue as well as a treatment issue. There is substantial evidence that this kind of sanctions-based treatment is very effective.

But our potential for success is greatly influenced by the extent to which we can gain the help of others. No matter how many resources we dedicate to reentry, we can't employ or house the offenders we supervise. We can't provide their health care. We can't give them friendship or guidance. We can only assist and encourage others to do so. We are very dedicated to identifying and developing those capacities.

We are encouraged by the support the federal government has shown for this model in the multi-agency Reentry Grant Program initiative, which is being administered by the Department of Justice. The grant encourages development of broad-based partnerships that address the entire range of social, economic, treatment and educational needs involved in the reentry process. The General Accounting Office and the Urban

Institute have recently published reports highlighting the many needs of returning prisoners. All of this activity demonstrates that reentry is gaining momentum as an important social policy issue.

We can achieve positive outcomes. We have already seen promising results: a 70 percent decrease in parolee rearrests since May of 1998 and a 50 percent drop in positive drug tests among offenders who completed treatment in the first months of FY 2001. We have increased drug testing by 600 percent in the past three years, and we believe that increased monitoring is influencing drug use among the population we supervise. These results are preliminary indicators of the kind of success that can contribute to our goal of a 50 percent reduction in recidivism among the violent and drug offenders we supervise by the end FY 2005.

The need for reentry programming is the logical outcome of incarceration because the overwhelming majority of prisoners return to the community. In the District, this means that more than 5,500 residents need the type of support and help that I have talked about today. It is vital to the safety and preservation of our city that we collaborate in meeting this challenge, and that we work together to build both government and community support for halfway houses and residential sanctions facilities in the neighborhoods where offenders live. We have established successful collaborations with our partners in reentry, the Bureau of Prisons and the U.S. Parole Commission. We look forward to continuing and enhancing those relationships.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak about this issue, which is at the heart of CSOSA's mission. I would be happy to answer any questions the Subcommittee may have.