

STATEMENT
OF
PAUL A. QUANDER, JR.,
DIRECTOR,
COURT SERVICES AND OFFENDER SUPERVISION AGENCY
FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
BEFORE THE
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE,
THE POSTAL SERVICE, AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OCTOBER 16, 2007

Chairman Davis, Congressman Marchant, Congresswoman Norton,
and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to appear before you today. Let me begin by thanking the subcommittee for this opportunity to discuss the reintegration of men and women returning to the District of Columbia from prison. As the Director of the federal agency that supervises approximately 15,200 men and women on community supervision in Washington, D.C., I know firsthand that the foundation of an individual's successful reentry can be laid during his or her time in prison. Incarceration provides an opportunity for the treatment, training, and mental preparation that can determine whether community supervision is a brief interlude between prison sentences or the beginning of a new way of life. The National Research Council's Committee on Community Supervision and Desistance from Crime puts it very succinctly in a new study of parole practices: "[A]

person should not leave prison without an immediately available...plan for postrelease life.”¹

In 1997, the United States Congress passed legislation transferring responsibility for housing long-term prisoners sentenced under the District of Columbia Code to the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP). The transfer was completed in 2000.² Over 6,600 District of Columbia inmates now serve their sentences in BOP facilities around the country.³ The largest concentration, about 700 inmates, is housed in a BOP contract facility, the Rivers Correctional Institution in Winton, NC, operated by The GEO Group.

The Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA) was created under the same legislation that transferred D.C. inmates to the BOP, and for much the same reason: to provide financial relief for the District of Columbia by shifting responsibility for a significant criminal justice function to the federal government. CSOSA encompasses the D.C. Pretrial Services Agency, as well as the adult probation and parole supervision functions.

Most of the offenders under CSOSA supervision have long histories of substance abuse, educational underachievement, and underemployment. Their initial risk assessments indicate that 42 percent feel they need substance abuse treatment (and 70 percent have a documented history of drug use); 39 percent are under supervision for drug offenses, and 20 percent have sought substance abuse treatment within the past six months. Only 56 percent have been employed during the past six months, and only 41 percent possess a GED or high school diploma.

With the resources it has received, CSOSA has improved community supervision by lowering caseloads, implementing stringent contact standards and other close supervision strategies, increasing drug testing, opening multiple field offices and

¹“National Research Council, Committee on Community Supervision and Desistance from Crime. “Parole, Desistance from Crime, and Community Integration.” Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2007. (Advance copy cited.)

² A Corrections Information Council (CIC) was established within the D.C. Mayor’s Office in FY 2003. The CIC’s mission was to “represent the District’s interest in the well-being of its prisoners in U.S. Bureau of Prisons facilities.” To that end, the CIC proposed conducting regular inspections of BOP facilities housing D.C. inmates. The CIC, which might have played a useful role in monitoring services available to D.C. Code offenders and coordinating post-release services delivery, has not met since February 2005.

³ As of May 31, 2007, according to the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency’s Office of Research and Evaluation.

automating the case management system. In addition, CSOSA has been resourced to provide substance abuse treatment to a fraction of the offenders that need it and to operate a modest learning and vocational service program that supplements the city's overburdened public treatment and employment services capacity. In 2006, CSOSA opened a Reentry and Sanctions Center to provide intensive assessment and treatment readiness programming to both high-risk offenders entering community supervision and those at risk for revocation due to substance abuse. While CSOSA is still implementing some aspects of its program and only beginning to evaluate others, it is clear that community supervision has been transformed in the District of Columbia.

On any given day, about 5,800 of the men and women under CSOSA's supervision are on parole or supervised release. Upon their return to the community, these individuals choose a path leading either back to criminality or to stability and productivity. Recent research on offender reentry stresses that successful reintegration into society begins during incarceration. As BOP Director Harley G. Lappin stated in March, 2006 testimony before the United States Sentencing Commission:

...[R]esearch has demonstrated conclusively that Bureau programs such as Federal Prison Industries, vocational training, education, and residential drug treatment have a positive effect on post-release recidivism. Specifically, these core inmate programs have been proven to substantially reduce recidivism, for as long as 12 years following release from prison....[F]or each dollar spent on inmate programs, taxpayers save substantial amounts of money through lower rates of recidivism: as much as \$6.23 for prison industries programs, \$7.13 for prison vocational training programs, \$5.65 for prison education programs, and even \$2.69 for prison drug treatment programs.

Clearly, the BOP recognizes that correctional programs can impact post-release success and provide taxpayer benefits.

In planning how best to improve programs and services available to incarcerated men and women from the District of Columbia, several points need to be considered:

- Resources should be dedicated to relevant educational and vocational training programs at a specific facility, and then D.C. Code offenders should be designated to, or transitioned through, that facility.

- Qualified staff must be hired and trained to deliver the programs, and program curricula must conform to BOP standards of quality and comprehensiveness.
- CSOSA should be involved in planning for post-release services, so that programming or treatment begun during incarceration can be continued in the community.

With this in mind, if Rivers is to be the institution housing the most D.C. Code offenders, CSOSA recommends the following program enhancements:

- **Substance Abuse Treatment.** CSOSA defines a clinically appropriate course of treatment as including residential, transitional housing, and outpatient care, often with medical detox services as well. If more returning D.C. offenders completed the BOP's 500-hour residential treatment program, and if completion of the program could coincide with the inmate's release to community supervision, CSOSA could then "pick up" services for most inmates with post-incarceration outpatient treatment and aftercare. For those offenders with the highest risk levels, services could be continued through the Reentry and Sanctions Center.

This level of coordination is consistent with best practices in reentry programming and addresses the most significant public safety threat posed by offenders in the community. Researchers have established beyond question that drug use and crime are related, and that crime escalates in severity and frequency as drug use increases.⁴ To coordinate prison-based and community-based treatment might enable a greater proportion of high-risk offenders to receive effective treatment and reduce the substantial numbers of offenders who are subsequently returned to incarceration due to drug use or drug-related crime. This could have a substantial impact on public safety.

⁴ See in particular the research of James A. Inciardi of the University of Delaware, who has published extensively on the relationship between drug use and crime since the 1970s.

The BOP treatment model has demonstrated results. The three-year outcome report found that inmates who receive treatment are more likely to avoid new arrest or revocation and maintain employment.⁵

- **Vocational Training.** The Office of the D.C. State Superintendent of Education provides an HVAC training program funded with a Department of Education grant; however, the grant program limits participation to 18- to 24-year-olds. The University of the District of Columbia (UDC) recently launched a pilot program to provide vocational skills assessment and enhancement. Program participants are expected to continue their training at UDC after release. CSOSA worked with both UDC and Rivers to negotiate the Memorandum of Understanding that governs this program. These are very promising programs, but more training opportunities are needed.

While employment is clearly an important part of successful reentry, recent research indicates that getting and keeping a job are complex problems. The Urban Institute's longitudinal study of reentry, *Returning Home*, interviewed 400 Illinois prisoners before and up to three times after their release. The study identified a cluster of issues that had a negative impact on employment: negative peer influences, prior revocations, lack of intimate relationships, drug or alcohol use, and neighborhood drug selling. The ability to maintain employment was related to overall life success and stability. Although most employed respondents were satisfied with their jobs a year after release, their wages averaged only \$9.60 per hour.⁶

In order to be as useful as possible to the offender preparing to re-enter the work force, vocational training should be linked to real job opportunities, equip the inmate with skills that are in demand, and incorporate training in techniques the offender can use to combat negative influences, attitudes, and habits. As with substance abuse treatment, the training experience should span the entire reentry experience, beginning in prison and following the offender into the community.

⁵ Federal Bureau of Prisons. "BOP Triad Drug Treatment Evaluation Three-Year Outcome Report," 2005.

⁶ Kachnowski, Vera. "Returning Home Illinois Policy Brief: Employment and Prisoner Reentry." Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2005.

CSOSA has been working with the GEO Group and the BOP to develop programs that provide the skills needed in the D.C. job market and to link these programs with local employers and trade unions. Such linkages will provide returning inmates with the opportunity for continued training and, with it, better long-term career prospects. At this time, we are working with the Carpenters Union to develop a union-approved carpentry training program modeled on the recently implemented program at California's Folsom State Prison. As in California, such a program could connect prison-based training with real post-release jobs. We hope this program will be the first of multiple successful efforts to bring vocational training to Rivers.

The Washington, D.C. area economy is primarily knowledge- and information-based. The D.C. Workforce Investment Council reported in 2005 that approximately 70 percent of area employment is in the Business Services sector (which encompasses information systems). Many D.C. offenders possess significant educational deficits; only about half of the offenders under supervision have a high school diploma or GED. However, those that do should have training opportunities in the areas where they are most likely to find a job.

BOP vocational programs range from under 100 hours to thousands of hours in duration and provide credentials ranging from a BOP certificate to Department of Labor-certified "apprentice" status. While it is difficult to define the capacity, duration, and content of programs that should be developed at Rivers, any development effort should take into account the average sentence served by Rivers inmates, which is 60 months. Based on the BOP's March 2005 "Occupational Training Programs Directory," a range of programs, including Business Technology (500 hours), Culinary Arts (1500 hours), and the Computer Technology apprenticeship (4,000 hours) might be considered in addition to an apprenticeship program in the building trades.

The BOP has developed a wide range of programs taught by full-time staff, adjunct instructors under contract, and through cooperative agreements with local colleges and trade schools. Each of these methods of program delivery should be considered for Rivers, which is located in a relatively isolated area.

- **Counseling and Life Skills Programs.** In addition to substance abuse, most inmates face significant behavior-based obstacles to successful reentry. Thirty-seven percent of offenders under CSOSA supervision self-report a mental health issue ranging from recurrent depression and anxiety to a serious personality disorder. In addition, inmates need help preparing for the stresses of reentry. Programs that help offenders manage situational stress and overcome ingrained errors of thinking, understanding, and behavior are just as necessary as job training or GED preparation; a recent Pennsylvania Department of Corrections study cites unrealistic expectations, anti-social attitudes and beliefs, and poor coping skills as the three most important underlying factors of parole violation.⁷ Inmates often lack the social and behavioral skills necessary to maintain a job. They may have significant problems with anger, motivation, or communication. The offender is much less likely to succeed upon release if he carries with him the same flawed belief system and coping mechanisms that have served him so poorly in the past.

CSOSA has collaborated with Rivers staff since the summer of 2003 to augment their release preparation program through two video conference programs. The CSOSA/Faith Community Partnership implemented video mentoring to link inmates nearing release from Rivers with faith-based mentors who provide pre-release encouragement and post-release support. We have also developed Community Resource Day, a quarterly video conference to provide inmates nearing release with information from local government and non-profit service providers in the critical areas of housing, health care, education, and employment. Response to these programs has been very positive; however, they are just one element of a comprehensive release preparation program.

The Revitalization Act launched a new era in the administration of justice in Washington, DC. By assuming the cost of housing and post-release supervision for

⁷ Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, "Research in Review, Special Issue: PA DOC's Parole Violator Study (Phase 2)." Harrisburg, PA: Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, December 2006.

D.C.'s inmate population, Congress also invested in their post-release success. To realize a return on that investment, we must ensure that D.C. inmates have access to the resources they need, both before and after their return to our city. I look forward to continuing to work with the BOP and our other partners to improve the programs available at Rivers and other institutions.

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