

**Testimony of Adrienne Poteat, Acting Director
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**Before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight
And Government Reform Subcommittee on Federal Workforce,
Postal Service and the District of Columbia**

**Entitled, “Halfway Home to the District: The Role of Halfway Houses
in Reducing Crime and Recidivism”**

February 3, 2010

Chairman Lynch, Ranking Member Chaffetz, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am pleased to appear before you today on behalf of the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA) to discuss the role of halfway houses in reducing crime and recidivism in the District of Columbia.

CSOSA was certified as a federal law enforcement agency in 2000 and charged with the unique responsibility of supervising men and women on probation, parole or supervised release in the District of Columbia. On any given day, CSOSA supervises 16,000 offenders, approximately 6,000 of whom are on parole or supervised released and have served a period of incarceration in the Federal Prison System. Each year, approximately 2,400 offenders return to the District from a Bureau of Prisons facility.

The demographic profile of the returning offender population suggests that many begin the reentry process with enormous challenges. Among those released to parole or supervised release in FY 2009, 44% had a history of violent crime, 70% had a history of substance abuse and 30% had a formally diagnosed mental illness. Nearly 40% did not

possess a high school diploma or GED. Grappling with those issues, these offenders arrive in the District with an immediate need to negotiate housing, find suitable employment, reestablish family connections, develop positive social networks, learn to manage their time and resources, and address any substance abuse, medical or mental health issues. This challenge is even more daunting for offenders released after long periods of incarceration during which their support networks may have dwindled or dissolved.

Recognizing this need, CSOSA created specialized Transitional Intervention for Parole Supervision (TIPS) teams to work solely with offenders returning to the community from prison. Through a series of progressively comprehensive Memoranda of Understanding, CSOSA, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, and the US Parole Commission established each agency's responsibilities related to pre-release planning for DC Code offenders convicted of felonies in DC Superior Court. Now approaching its 12th year, the TIPS program provides reentry services to offenders who transition from prison through a Residential Reentry Center (which I will refer to as halfway houses throughout my testimony) to community supervision, or offenders released directly from a BOP facility to community supervision.

TIPS Community Supervision Officers begin the release planning process with offenders long before they are released from prison to a halfway house or the community. BOP case managers submit a release plan to CSOSA that includes the offender's proposed living arrangement and potential employment. The TIPS CSO investigates the

release plan to ensure that the proposed home and employment is conducive to the offender's successful reentry and does not pose a risk to the community, including returning the offender to a home where the victim resides or, in the case of sex offenders, to a residence where children are present. This effort establishes a community 'safety net' where the offender's most prevalent risk factors are identified and addressed through community support and criminal justice accountability.

Offenders who transition through a halfway house undergo a comprehensive risk and needs assessment by the TIPS CSO to identify the offender's substance abuse history, criminal behavior patterns, history of violence or aggression, educational or vocational deficits, and physical or mental health challenges. Armed with this information, the TIPS CSO, working directly from the halfway house, develops an individualized supervision plan that addresses the needs identified in the assessment and includes specific goals for the offender. During the course of their halfway house stay, a typical offender may be enrolled in the Unity Health Care program, be referred to Goodwill Industries for job placement or enroll in a skills training program with the Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC), be connected to a mentor from an area faith institution, and secure placement in transitional housing upon their release. The offender will also be oriented to his supervision requirements and the consequences for non-compliance.

Unfortunately, of the 2,400 offenders who returned to the District and CSOSA supervision last year, only 4 in 10, or approximately 960 offenders, transitioned through the three halfway houses with which BOP has contracts for DC offenders, namely, Hope Village and Efforts from Ex-Convicts (EFEC) for male offenders and Fairview for women offenders. The average halfway house stay for CSOSA offenders is 45 to 60 days. Although our committed core of TIPS officers do a tremendous job in helping offenders acquire the skills and resources to meet their day-to-day challenges in this short period of time, our experience leads us to believe that a longer halfway house stay may be effective in further stabilizing offenders during this critical period.

To underscore the importance of a halfway house transition on offender compliance and an increased opportunity to successfully complete supervision, I want to provide a general comparison of offenders released to CSOSA following a halfway house placement and those released without a halfway house placement.

Parole and supervised release offenders transitioning from the BOP to CSOSA with a halfway house placement are more likely to have a criminal history involving violent crimes and/or drug-related crimes. They are less likely to have a criminal history involving a sex offense and are identical with respect to firearm charges. They look the same on demographic, behavioral health and other factors associated with supervision compliance. However, when we look at compliance during the first 180-day period following release from BOP, we see clear advantages for offenders who begin supervision following a halfway house placement. More specifically, we observe

noticeable differences with respect to an offender's compliance on supervision. Employment stability and housing stability have long been associated with greater supervision compliance among our offender population. Offenders who have experienced a halfway house placement are 20% to 40% more likely find themselves in stable employment and stable housing during the 180-day period we consider to be the riskiest period with respect to supervision failure.

Research sponsored by the National Institute of Justice supports the need for a comprehensive strategy for addressing offender's needs during the first 180 days after release from prison. A 2002 national study conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics¹ indicates that offenders are at greatest risk for having their supervision term revoked and being sent back to prison due to a new crime or a serious supervision violation during the first six months following release from prison. Nearly 68% of offenders will be rearrested within three years of their release from prison. The most common rearrests are for property, drug or public order offenses. Of these offenders, a little less than half will be arrested within the first 180 days of their release date. Thus, the first 180 days following release from prison are clearly the most critical intervention period to slow or divert an offender's likelihood of rearrest, revocation and return to prison.² CSOSA employs an intensified close supervision strategy for offenders who do not transition

¹ Langan, Patrick A. & Levin, David J. (2002). *Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994*. US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

² The study included inmates from the department of corrections of 15 states: Arizona, Maryland, North Carolina, California, Michigan, Ohio, Delaware, Minnesota, Oregon, Florida, New Jersey, Texas, Illinois, New York and Virginia. Although the study did not include inmates from the District of Columbia or inmates serving sentences at BOP, CSOSA relied on the study primarily for its strong methodology regarding outcomes of interest with full knowledge that the results may differ somewhat from the results of the national study. Additionally, the sample was the most comprehensive research available for making comparison with CSOSA's three-year follow-up for tracking arrests, convictions and revocations.

through a halfway house. These offenders are considered 'high risk' and are supervised at the Maximum level until their CSOSA assessments are completed. They have frequent contact with their supervision officers, may be placed on GPS monitoring, have a more stringent drug testing schedule, and are subject to accountability tours and possibly day reporting.

Now, I'd like to turn your attention to an immediate challenge currently facing my agency. Approximately 500 additional offenders are being considered for release as a result of a recent court ruling that determined that the USPC incorrectly applied parole guidelines to DC Code offenders eligible for hearing under the 1987 guidelines of the former DC Board of Parole. The USPC began hearings in January and will conclude them at the end of March 2010. It is anticipated that 75 to 80% of these 500 offenders will be released to the District of Columbia between April and June 2010. Most of these offenders were convicted of violent crimes during the height of the city's crack epidemic (1985-1989) and pose significant supervision challenges.

Given the USPC's expedited processes, CSOSA may not have sufficient time to conduct adequate pre-release planning for all of these offenders most of whom have been incarcerated for ten years or more and may no longer have ties to the community. As such, the potential for homelessness among this population is significant. We anticipate that many of these offenders will lack employable skills or a legitimate means of financial support.

We believe that these offenders' chances of success would be greatly improved were they allowed to transition to the community following a halfway house stay. This would allow CSOSA an opportunity to help them find suitable housing, enroll in training or secure a legitimate source of income, connect with a faith-based mentor to develop life skills and an outside support mechanism, link to substance and mental health services, and adjust to CSOSA's stringent supervision requirements. All of the city's criminal justice and social service stakeholders will need to come together to collectively address the challenges these offenders could potentially pose.

In closing, CSOSA has been collaborating with criminal justice executives, practitioners, researchers, and academics at the national and local level to develop strategies to reverse the alarming pattern of recidivism. There is at least one consistent theme that has emerged from our shared work – offender reentry has to begin before inmates leave prison and intervention service delivery must be 'front-loaded.' CSOSA, through its TIPS program, is doing the best it can with respect to working with inmates six months prior to release from the Bureau of Prisons.

We look forward to continuing our close collaboration with the Bureau of Prisons, our halfway house providers and our other local and federal partners, to enhance public safety while also reducing the rate of recidivism. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today and welcome any questions. Thank you.