

**STATEMENT**

**BY**

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Committee on Government Reform  
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Chairman Davis and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I want to begin by commending the committee for scheduling a reentry hearing during Reentry Week. 2005 marks the fourth consecutive year that the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA) has collaborated with faith institutions in the District of Columbia, as well as the District government, to present a full week of events highlighting the needs of returning offenders. We also appeal to local faith institutions to dedicate a service to the issue of reentry. I attended reentry services at two churches last Sunday, and our week will close out with a Muslim prayer service at Howard University on Friday.

Tomorrow night, our third annual Citywide Reentry Assembly will be held at St. Luke Center on East Capitol Street. We will gather to thank the many volunteers who mentor offenders, to recognize the lead institutions in our Faith/Community Partnership, and to hear directly from offenders who are receiving faith-based support. I invite all of you to join us for an inspirational evening.

All of us here know the statistics of reentry. The District of Columbia is no different from any other city, in that each year more than two thousand prisoners return home to our neighborhoods. For the most part, they are unskilled and undereducated, with long histories of substance abuse and arrest, but short histories of gainful

employment and stability. They are older than you might realize, with an average age of 35. For their entire adult lives, they have cycled in and out of prison. It is the most stable environment many of them have ever known.

We also know that when we consider reentry, we have to think not just about the individual offender but about the small and large systems they impact. Families, the neighborhoods, the broader community, our city and in fact the entire metropolitan area are affected, positively or negatively, by the actions of returning offenders.

We at CSOSA view community supervision as both a public safety duty and a public service opportunity. Our mission is to enhance public safety through effective supervision. If we achieve that mission, we will reduce recidivism and in doing so reduce the number of D.C. residents and visitors who are victimized. But there is another side to reducing recidivism. For every offender who does not commit a new crime, there is the possibility of a productive citizen who holds a job, parents a child, and contributes to his or her community. Effective community supervision is not just the prevention of wrong-doing, it is the encouragement of right-doing.

That is why in 2001 we reached out to the city's clergy and began our Faith/Community Partnership. Our goal has been to connect returning offenders with institutions and individuals who can support them not only during their supervision, but also can serve as a resource and a haven long after the term of supervision has ended. Many offenders have never known a positive, accepting, non-criminal community. Volunteer mentors can introduce offenders to a different type of environment and a new circle of acquaintances.

Many offenders also don't know that churches run substance abuse support groups, men's support groups, family ministries, clothing banks, and other support programs. Within our Faith/Community Partnership, three lead institutions identify and broker these services to maximize the support available to returning offenders and their families. Faith-based support does not replace CSOSA's treatment and education

programs, but it supplements our capacity with aftercare and more one-on-one contact than the Community Supervision officer can provide. We currently have a network of 46 participating faith institutions and approximately 200 volunteer mentors. This is a significant resource for offenders and their families to draw upon.

In 2003 we recognized that we needed to begin the process of linking returning offenders with services well before they were released from prison. Using teleconferencing technology, we took the Faith/Community Partnership into the Rivers Correctional Institution, a Bureau of Prisons contract facility that houses over 1,000 D.C. code offenders. That outreach has developed into regular Community Resource Day videoconferences, at which representatives from the Faith/Community Partnership and a variety of District social service agencies provide information to men nearing release.

Partnership with CSOSA has encouraged our lead faith institutions to expand the range of services they provide. The East of the River Clergy-Police-Community Partnership received a grant last year to implement the Department of Labor's Ready4Work initiative. East of the River is also converting a 14-unit apartment building into transitional housing for returning offenders. CSOSA also partnered with Rev. Anthony Motley to co-locate a Learning Lab and a community housing resource center at the Bellevue Center in far Southeast.

The issue of housing reminds us that no matter how committed we are to developing partnerships and leveraging existing resources, some of the problems of reentry require more than collaboration to solve. According to the District's Department of Housing and Community Development, a household income of \$40,000 per year, or roughly \$20 per hour, is necessary to rent a two-bedroom apartment at market rate. Almost half of District households report an income of less than that. These are the households most likely to be impacted by reentry—and returning offenders compete directly with other workers in these households for a limited supply of viable jobs. About 25 percent of the release plans we investigate do not contain a stable housing placement. Alternative arrangements have to be made, such as temporary “Public Law”

placement in halfway houses or, in some cases, referral to a city homeless shelter. We are working with non-profits within the District—such as Our Place DC, which provides services to women offenders, East of the River, and the Marshall Heights Community Development Organization—to raise awareness of the housing issue and develop strategies to increase funding for transitional housing. We also support efforts to bring the Delancey Street model of self-supporting transitional housing and entrepreneurship to the District of Columbia.

Finally, we know that offender housing raises public safety concerns. In 2004, we executed a memorandum of understanding with the D.C. Housing Authority to share information about offenders living in public housing, similar to our successful partnership with the Metropolitan Police Department. This type of collaborative policing reinforces accountability and makes it harder for offenders to fall “under the radar” of detection.

Viable housing is impossible without viable employment. Returning offenders face significant obstacles to getting and keeping jobs that pay enough to live; about half of the offenders under CSOSA’s supervision are unemployed at any given time. Our Vocational Development Specialists work not just on improving the offender’s skills but on encouraging employers to hire them. Increasing employers’ willingness to hire and train ex-offenders is essential to successful reentry programming. To that end, we are collaborating with the District to implement Project Empowerment Plus, which combines life skills training with subsidized employment. As part of Reentry Week, I will attend a graduation ceremony for the life skills portion of the program.

For many offenders, nothing is a more accurate predictor of recidivism than relapse into drug use. We see time and again that drug use is the first link in a chain that drags the offender back to prison. For men and women with long-term, severe substance abuse problems, intensive intervention has to begin at the moment of release. We have developed and implemented an intensive program at our Assessment and Orientation Center that takes offenders directly after release and puts them through 30 days of assessment, counseling, fatherhood classes, and treatment groups to ensure that they are

prepared for reentry—and for most, that means inpatient or outpatient drug treatment as well. Evaluation indicates that this program has a positive affect on recidivism; participants were as much as 75 percent less likely to be arrested. Over 1,300 offenders have completed this program since 1996.

Based on the proven success of the program, we are expanding the AOC into a Reentry and Sanctions Center that will provide this level of programming to over 1,200 high-risk offenders and defendants each year. We are currently renovating space for this program, and the first two units are scheduled to open in November of 2005.

I am proud of CSOSA's progress in putting a successful reentry program in place, and particularly of our collaboration with the city to develop the *Citywide Reentry Strategy*. The strategy takes a systemic look at reentry, focusing on the multiple areas of need and the multiple agencies that influence and implement solutions. The Reentry Strategy resulted from a three-year collaborative process and we are confident that it will inform the discussion of reentry for many more years to come.

As Congress debates reentry issues, I hope we do not confine discussion of reentry to the criminal justice arena but broaden it to all related areas—drug policy, family policy, employment policy, and housing policy. I hope that we continue to link volunteerism with reentry and reach out to the faith community so that more returning offenders can experience first-hand their neighbors' compassion and commitment. We must also remain mindful of the need to restore healthy parents to the children devastated by incarceration.

As a lifelong resident of the District, like my parents before me, I have seen too clearly how a neighborhood is wounded when most of its young men are incarcerated. As Director of CSOSA, I am committed to putting as many healing tools in place as possible and encouraging our partners to do the same. Our discussion of reentry must always include the child, the victim, the grandmother, and the businessman as well as the offender. Community supervision is an essential aspect of reentry, but no matter how

aggressively we supervise, we cannot achieve success on our own. Too many variables influence reentry for the outcome to rest solely on enforcement. According to the Urban Institute's analysis of reentry in Baltimore, family support, substance abuse treatment, and employment assistance are what returning offenders need most. Those essentials can only be provided through concerted, sustained collaborations in which all partners contribute to the restoration of individuals, families, and communities. That should be the true goal of all reentry initiatives.

I thank you again for the opportunity to participate in this hearing.