

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD**

**SUBMITTED BY**

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for the District of Columbia**

**before the**

**U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Government Reform  
Subcommittee on the District of Columbia**

**Hearing on Criminal Justice Coordination  
in the District of Columbia**

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I am pleased to submit Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency's (CSOSA) testimony to the Subcommittee on the District of Columbia regarding the General Accounting Office's March 2001 report on the District of Columbia criminal justice system and the need for improved coordination among the different agencies that comprise it.

I agree with the conclusion of the GAO report that greater coordination is vital to improving criminal justice functions in the District. I would like to commend the subcommittee for making this issue a priority and providing an opportunity to discuss it.

The Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency, or CSOSA, was established under the National Capital Revitalization and Self-Government Improvement Act of 1997. CSOSA began under a trustee and was certified as an independent executive branch agency in August of 2000.

Collaboration is central to our mission of increasing public safety through effective community supervision and providing quality information to criminal justice decisionmakers. We depend on our partners in the criminal justice system to support our mission, and their help is vital to our success.

Throughout CSOSA's development, we have sought to maximize opportunities for collaboration with other agencies. Collaboration with such partners as the Metropolitan Police Department increases the level of accountability we can achieve with the offenders we supervise. We have developed close working relationships with the MPD throughout the city, which helps us increase our supervision presence in the neighborhoods where offenders live and work.

We are also partnering with D.C. citizens, businesses, and non-profit organizations through our Community Justice Action Networks. We work with the Federal Bureau of Prisons to prepare offenders in halfway houses for parole. We are improving our collaboration with D.C.'s social service agencies to help offenders gain

access to education, employment, and treatment services. CSOSA's Community Supervision Program works closely with the Pretrial Services Agency and the D.C. Public Defender Service, which is funded through CSOSA's appropriation, to improve both our supervision practices and the quality of information regarding offenders on our caseloads.

These efforts have proven the effectiveness and necessity of collaborating to maximize the use of our resources. As a new agency, we are very conscious of our need to demonstrate success, and we know that our success depends on our ability to work with our partners and our internal coordination.

The GAO report points out that “[i]n the absence of a single hierarchy and funding structure, agencies have generally acted in their own interests rather than in the interest of the system as a whole.”<sup>1</sup> We don't believe that CSOSA's record supports this conclusion. Our efforts have, instead, demonstrated the capacity to partner with virtually all of the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council's (CJCC's) members in a manner that is mutually beneficial—increasing the scope and quality of the services we all provide.

The CJCC has provided an invaluable forum in which to discuss and debate issues and initiatives of mutual concern to the member agencies. Perhaps most importantly, the Council has served as a reliable, neutral source of information. The value of such information cannot be overestimated. It helps define both the problems and the solutions. It improves our ability to reach consensus and commit to action. Along with this information-gathering and analysis function, the CJCC can and should formulate policy recommendations around the issues it considers.

In order for the CJCC to continue its work effectively, it must have permanent funding and staff. The mechanism to provide them is one of our subjects today, and I would like to address the remainder of my comments to that issue.

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<sup>1</sup> “D.C. Criminal Justice System: Better Coordination Needed Among Participating Agencies.” United States General Accounting Office, March 2001, p. 3.

The unique nature of D.C.'s criminal justice system makes the CJCC's independence and autonomy particularly important. In a system where many local and federal agencies must communicate in order to achieve results, the forum in which they do so should not be dominated by any single agency's agenda. Such an approach to criminal justice coordination would discourage full participation by all stakeholders and might threaten the CJCC's longevity and effectiveness.

The CJCC should consider as its highest priority the issues, initiatives, and needs that affect multiple member agencies and the public safety of the District. It can address such issues more effectively than any single agency and provide a unified voice for a system that too often seems fragmented. To that end, the CJCC should work collaboratively with the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice to coordinate federal and local law enforcement, corrections, and supervision. It should develop priorities for allocating federal grant resources to maximize benefits to the entire criminal justice system. The CJCC should report on its initiatives and its progress annually to its membership and the public.

We support establishing the CJCC as an independent District of Columbia entity. This connection to the District should not limit the CJCC's independence or its membership, but should clearly establish the CJCC's focus and scope.

The GAO report recommends that Congress consider "requiring that all D.C. criminal justice agencies report multi-agency initiatives to [the Council], which would serve as a clearinghouse for these initiatives...."<sup>2</sup> Doing this on a collaborative, partnership basis has already proven to be an effective and efficient method of operation for the CJCC. We believe that in order to sustain this effectiveness and the buy-in of all CJCC members, participation must remain voluntary.

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<sup>2</sup> United States General Accounting Office, *op cit.*, p. 5.

The CJCC functioned best when it had independent funding to support a small professional staff. Those critical resources have been lost. Recent action by the Council of the District of Columbia to formally re-establish the CJCC and provide new funding and staff is a positive step forward. But that legislation is not yet final, and the opportunity for further consideration and discussion remains. All of the agencies that served on the CJCC should be involved in any deliberations regarding its future structure.

Let me conclude by stating that CSOSA remains fully committed to participating in the CJCC. Our hope is that it will flourish and facilitate coordination that benefits not only the criminal justice system in which we work, but also the citizens we serve.