

**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**

**Concerning “The Local Role of the United States Parole Commission: Increasing
Public Safety, Reducing Recidivism, and Using Alternatives to Re-incarceration in
the District of Columbia”**

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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 work of CSOSA and its connection with the United States Parole Commission (USPC).

CSOSA is a federal law enforcement agency with a unique local mission. The Agency supervises approximately 16,000 men and women on probation, parole, or supervised release in the District of Columbia. Two-thirds of these offenders are probationers who have not gone to prison and are accountable to the D.C. Superior Court rather than the USPC. Most of the remaining third, or about 6,000 offenders, are on parole or supervised release and have served a term of incarceration in the Federal Prison System and are accountable to the USPC. CSOSA includes the D.C. Pretrial Services Agency, which supervises another 6,000 defendants to ensure that they comply with court-imposed release conditions and appear for scheduled court dates.

Our offenders face many challenges. Thirty percent have a history of violent crime, 64% have a history of substance abuse and 13% have a formally diagnosed mental illness. Many others have undiagnosed mental health conditions. Nearly 40% do not

possess a high school diploma or GED and only 47% of our population is employed. On an average day, 800 offenders reside in D.C. homeless shelters or have housing situations that are considered unstable. Stable housing and employment are critical factors affecting the likelihood that an offender will commit a new crime, violate the terms of their release, and ultimately, whether or not they will be revoked to incarceration. Our agency works hard to find creative, cost-effective, evidence-based solutions for these problems in an effort to help our offenders successfully complete their community supervision.

CSOSA uses a wide variety of tools in order to provide the offenders we supervise with an opportunity to succeed. Addressing the specific set of challenges presented by each offender requires us to reach out for help from local and federal agencies, as well as community-based organizations and local businesses for assistance with housing, education and training, employment, family services, mental health and substance abuse treatment, healthcare and more. We partner with numerous agencies and organizations to access the services that our clients need. Yet, while we recognize the critical importance of the services, CSOSA's highest operational priority is public safety and our main strategy in support of our public safety mission is close supervision.

In order to provide close supervision, we use a number of evidence-based strategies to enforce offender compliance and interrupt non-compliant behavior before it escalates to new criminal activity or revocation. Through a system of graduated sanctions, CSOSA imposes increasingly restrictive penalties on offenders for violating their release conditions. Sanctions can involve increased office visits or drug testing, GPS monitoring, residential placement in the Reentry and Sanctions Center (RSC) or a

Halfway Back program, and for parolees and supervised releasees, a Reprimand Sanction Hearing.

If an offender does not return to compliance or is arrested, we file an Alleged Violation Report (AVR) with the appropriate releasing authority. The average AVR documented eight violations, most (65 percent) related to drug use or failure to comply with drug testing. Ultimately, recidivism is the result of a series of events and it is affected by multiple factors. Unemployment, an unstable living arrangement, poor community or family support, and chronic mental health or substance abuse problems all influence the behavior that leads an offender to recidivism.

The USPC and CSOSA have a very close operational relationship, with our respective staffs in daily contact regarding the adjustment of the 6,000 D.C. offenders under the Commission's jurisdiction that are also under CSOSA's supervision. Routine communications include both recommendations to reward compliant offenders with placement on inactive supervision, as well as the submission of AVRs on offenders that are non-compliant. During the past few years, CSOSA has been collaborating with the USPC on some special initiatives intended to improve our mutual response to offenders' non-compliant behavior.

In May 2006, CSOSA, in conjunction with the USPC, created an alternative sanction option called the Reprimand Sanction Hearing. This is a graduated sanction that permits the USPC to address an offender's non-compliant behavior and to encourage the offender to comply with the conditions of his or her release as a last step before a formal parole revocation hearing. On a monthly basis, Reprimand Sanction Hearings are conducted throughout the city at various CSOSA field sites with both CSOSA staff and a

member of the USPC present. From May 2006 through July 31, 2009, 259 hearings were conducted. Participating offenders have shown a higher level of compliance following these hearings.

Just yesterday, CSOSA launched the new Secure Residential Treatment Program (SRTP). The SRTP will serve as an alternative placement for eligible D.C. Code offenders on parole or supervised release who face revocation for technical violations (including substance abuse) and, in some cases, new criminal violations. We are partnering in this endeavor with the USPC, D.C. Department of Corrections and the Public Defender Service. The initial pilot demonstration will consist of an up-to-180-day treatment regimen involving 32 offenders and is scheduled to run until March 2010. During the pilot demonstration, CSOSA will fund and operate the treatment intervention in one 32-bed unit of the Correctional Treatment Facility. The USPC has been an integral partner in our efforts to establish the SRTP program model and implement the pilot demonstration.

Our Office of Research and Evaluation is currently working with the USPC on the development of its new Violation Sanction Matrix and the integration of that tool with CSOSA's own Graduated Sanction Matrix. The alignment of these tools will provide uniformity in the response to supervision violations by parolees and supervised releasees in the future.

In order to effectively manage the offenders that we supervise and facilitate their success in the community, CSOSA employs a formal assessment process to determine their risk level and needs. Using a tool called the Auto Screener, our Community Supervision Officers, or CSOs, establish a prescriptive supervision plan which provides

guidance regarding supervision levels and the need for referrals to community resources and service providers.

Our supervision model includes ongoing reevaluation of the offender's needs and compliance, which may result in modification of the supervision plan. Supervision plan changes can include an increase or decrease in the frequency of the contact with the CSO or a change in the offender's drug testing schedule or educational or employment plan. As a last resort, non-compliant behavior can result in the submission of an AVR to either the Court or the USPC recommending a sanction or revocation.

CSOSA uses a wide variety of tools to provide the offenders we supervise with an opportunity to succeed. Addressing each offender's individual challenges requires us to seek assistance from local and federal agencies, as well as the non-profit and business communities, to secure housing, educational opportunities, employment, family services, mental health and substance abuse treatment, healthcare and more. While we partner with numerous agencies and organizations to coordinate the services that the offenders need, we have also made infrastructure investments in order to provide some assistance directly.

In 2006, CSOSA opened the Reentry and Sanctions Center (RSC). Its mission is to provide intensive assessment and reintegration programming for high risk offenders and defendants as well as residential sanctions for offenders and defendants who violate their community release conditions. Many of the offenders at the RSC report to the facility immediately following their release from prison. The RSC is a 102-bed facility, with six units, including two for individuals with co-occurring mental health and substance abuse disorders. It provides a 28-day holistic and multi-disciplinary program

including clinical assessments, treatment readiness and behavioral therapy. Upon completion of the RSC program, most offenders and defendants are referred to residential or outpatient substance abuse treatment programs. We maintain contracts with a network of treatment providers that enable us to ensure that services are readily available for high-risk offenders with an immediate treatment need.

Employment is a key factor in an offender's community reintegration. The job market is tight across the nation, but it is especially difficult for individuals with a criminal record seeking to obtain meaningful employment in the Washington Metropolitan Area. Offenders have found themselves competing for entry-level employment against individuals who have far greater skills and fewer deficits, such as a criminal record. In order to help address the employment challenges that offenders face, we have established a unit called VOTEE (Vocational Opportunities, Training, Education and Employment) to provide assistance. VOTEE offers educational and vocational referral services based on individual need. The VOTEE unit conducts quarterly pre-screening and orientation sessions to prepare offenders to compete for jobs in various employment sectors. Most recently, these events have concentrated on green jobs in industries that focus on energy efficiency and other environmentally-friendly practices, as well as jobs in the food services, environmental services, technology and construction markets. Another important aspect of VOTEE's work is GED preparation and improving literacy levels.

Recently, CSOSA and our VOTEE unit formed an exciting partnership with the D.C. Office of the State Superintendent of Education, the D.C. Department of Employment Services, Federal Bureau of Prisons, the Hotel Association of Washington

and the University of the District of Columbia to offer up to 60 newly released offenders living in local Residential Reentry Centers the opportunity to participate in a 20-week paid Hospitality Industry Career Training and Internship Program. Graduates of the program will receive a certification from the American Hotel and Lodging Educational Institute which will enable them to compete for career opportunities across the country. We are hopeful that other sectors of our local economy will be inspired to replicate this program within their own industries.

As I stated above, our offenders face a significant challenge in locating suitable, safe and affordable housing. As a result of criminality and incarceration, many offenders have become indigent, or have lost contact with or the support of their families and become homeless. In order to help address this urgent and most basic need, CSOSA was provided \$1 million in FY 2009 and \$500,000 in FY 2010 to contract with transitional housing providers for transitional housing for reentrants.

CSOSA contracts for both faith-based and non faith-based transitional housing. Our primary faith-based transitional housing provider is Rev. Donald Isaac's Faith-Based Transitional Housing Program. It is designed to provide the skills an offender needs in order to become self-sufficient. This model program consists of three phases. The first phase focuses on the development of a case plan that identifies the services each resident requires. The second phase concentrates on obtaining employment and developing constructive relationships with the community and the third phase consists of placement in permanent housing, while maintaining stable employment. After an offender moves on from Rev. Isaac's program, they still maintain contact with their mentor and

participate in after-care meetings and follow-up sessions to assess their progress and provide assistance if needed.

Earlier this year, CSOSA partnered with the D.C. Department of Housing and Community Development, and the D.C. Office of Ex-Offender Affairs to conduct a Landlord Roundtable. This event brought together local landlords to discuss the provision of affordable rental housing opportunities to offenders who are employed and in compliance with their release conditions. Several landlords expressed a willingness to rent to offenders and we are working with our partners to make appropriate referrals.

In addition to our active partnerships with government agencies and community-based organizations, we are also committed to working with the faith community in Washington, DC. Since 2002, we have reached out to the city's clergy and have worked with them to form a successful city-wide mentoring program that has helped offenders find jobs, stabilize relationships, locate housing, and maintain a substance-free lifestyle.

Through my testimony here today, I have attempted to show that CSOSA works with its government and community-based partners to address the challenges offenders face through a variety of treatment and support services. It is important to note, however, that the extent to which the need for these services outstrips their availability affects the extent of offender recidivism.

Attorney General Eric Holder recently said in a speech delivered to the American Bar Association that “[w]e no longer must choose between more prisoners or more crime: we can reduce our dependence on incarceration and we can reduce crime rates.” Mr. Holder suggested that through smarter law enforcement efforts and a more sincere dedication to the rehabilitation of criminal behavior, we will see a decrease in recidivism.

CSOSA has operated with this same philosophy in mind since our certification in August 2000 as an independent Federal agency.

We look forward to the continuation of our close collaboration with the USPC, as well as all of our local and federal partners, as we work together to enhance public safety while also reducing the rate of incarceration. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today and welcome any questions.

Thank you.