

**Testimony of Adrienne Poteat, Deputy Director  
Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency**

**Before the**

**Council of the District of Columbia  
Housing and Workforce Development Committee**

**May 5, 2010**

Chairman Brown, members of the Committee, My name is Adrienne Poteat, and I am the Deputy Director of the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA). I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the housing and employment needs of the men and women on probation, parole and supervised release in the District of Columbia.

On any given day, CSOSA supervises 16,000 individuals. Approximately 6,400, or 27%, are on parole or supervised released and have served a period of incarceration within the Federal Prison System. The majority of our clients, 63%, are on probation and generally serve their entire sentence in the community. Our clients live and work in every ward of the city. They are our relatives, our neighbors, our friends and our associates.

Our experience has shown that clients who have stable housing and maintain employment are significantly more likely to successfully complete their supervision obligation. Yet the harsh reality is that many of our clients face significant challenges securing and maintaining housing and employment. Until there is a reliable systematic

response that effectively addresses these challenges, clients with these unmet needs will experience an increased risk of supervision failure. This situation has implications for public safety. As such, together, we must do all we can to remedy it.

The following demographic profile of our client population reveals why it is difficult for many of them to establish a stable and productive life style here in the District of Columbia. In FY 2009, 44% of our population had a history of violent crime and 70% had a history of substance abuse. Roughly 30% of our clients present with a history of or current need for behavioral health services. Slightly more than 40% did not possess a high school diploma or GED, and a substantial percentage had no significant work history.

CSOSA's community supervision program is designed to motivate our clients to curtail their criminal behavior. In addition, through our Vocational Opportunities, Training, Education and Employment program, we seek to identify and address our clients' educational and skill deficits, prepare them for work and provide referrals to employment opportunities. We also have some resources to provide transitional housing for those leaving substance abuse treatment or returning home from prison. Unfortunately, however, we are unable to provide housing for all that are homeless or to place all who are ready and able to work in jobs.

On average, half of the men and women under our supervision are unemployed at any given time. Of the 8,000 unemployed, slightly more than half of them, or about

4500, are actually employable -- that is, they are not in treatment, do not have an active warrant pending for a supervision violation, are not receiving disability income and are physically able to work. About a third of our ready to work unemployed are under age 30.

Our biggest barriers to securing sustained employment for our employable clients are: (1) the mismatch between their education and skill levels and the available jobs in the District's knowledge-based economy; (2) the reluctance of employers to hire people with criminal convictions; and (3) a tight job market in which our clients are competing with everyone else for fewer jobs, particularly low-skilled and entry level jobs. Over the past several years, the Department of Employment Service's Project Empowerment Program has been a great source of opportunity for our clients. However, we now understand that it recently closed its waiting list, which had grown to approximately 8,000 applicants. As a result, everyone must now go to the Department's One-Stop Service Centers for assistance. It is unclear what the outcome of this situation will be for our job seekers. Our concern is that delay in the receipt of employment placement and job training assistance can increase the risk of supervision failure.

We are presently working with the DC Department of Employment Services to develop a comprehensive workforce development strategy that will focus on preparing our clients to work in high demand industries. In addition, working with our community partners, we've recently identified 150 training slots for our clients. These include training in auto repair, construction, computer technology, and weatherization. We are

excited about these opportunities and grateful for the continued commitment of our partner organizations. However, much more assistance is needed to get the thousands seeking employment or training placed.

During FY 2009, CSOSA placed 877 of our clients into contract transitional housing. We have placed 230 clients in transitional housing thus far this fiscal year. Even with this substantial investment, as of today there are still approximately 700 of our clients residing in homeless shelters and another 204 who have no fixed housing.

The number of homeless clients will likely increase over the next few months as the result of a court ruling last year in the Sellmon case. That decision that affected approximately 500 DC Code felons incarcerated in Federal Bureau of Prisons facilities. It is anticipated that 75 to 80% of these individuals will be released to the District of Columbia between April and June of this year. Most of them were convicted of violent crimes during the height of the city's crack epidemic in the late 1980s. They have been imprisoned for ten years or more. Many will need housing as well as a viable means of financial support. They will present a significant and added challenge for CSOSA and the District's social service agencies.

The problem of homelessness is intractable and does not lend itself to simple solutions for our population. Establishing a limited transitional housing budget has been CSOSA's short term solution. Last year, we worked collaboratively with the DC Office on Ex-Offender Affairs and the DC Department of Housing and Community

Development to hold a Landlord Roundtable. The purpose of this event was to appeal to landlords to consider renting to our clients with stable work histories that lacked stable credit histories or savings for a security deposit. We had little success with this effort but will continue to try. We welcome the opportunity to work with the city to develop a broader solution to this critical issue.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before the Committee today. I welcome any questions that you may have.