

STATEMENT
OF
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FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
BEFORE THE
COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND URBAN AFFAIRS
ROUNDTABLE ON POVERTY
JANUARY 16, 2008

Chairman Barry and fellow Councilmembers:

Many factors can influence an individual's economic status and stability. I am appearing here today to discuss how involvement in the criminal justice system and the experience of incarceration can lead to life in poverty.

The Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA) supervises approximately 15,000 men and women on probation, parole, or supervised release. These individuals have been convicted of a crime under the D.C. Code; about a third of them are on supervision following a term of incarceration. The Pretrial Services Agency, an independent entity within CSOSA, manages an additional 7,000 defendants who are under some level of court-ordered pretrial supervision, which can range from notification of upcoming court appearances to intensive substance abuse treatment. About 20 percent of the District's African-American males between 18 and 65 are under either pretrial or post-conviction supervision.

The economic impact of criminal justice involvement is not confined to the individual offender. That offender emerges from his experience less able to support his children, pay taxes, contribute to his church, patronize local businesses, or buy a home.

He is far more likely to be economically dependent on elderly parents or grandparents than to supplement their limited incomes. Not only does he need services such as drug treatment, job training, and health care, but those whom he might have supported will also need these services. As The Urban Institute has summarized the situation: “[H]igh rates of crime and incarceration tend to make a poor economic situation worse, which may contribute ... to a cycle of continuous deterioration and blight.”¹ Certainly, when these circumstances are repeated for one in five male wage-earners in the city’s African-American community, the total impact is significant.

The D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute documented this impact in their October 2007 report on income disparity.² The city’s economic gains over the past decade have bypassed many residents, particularly African-Americans who have no post-secondary education. For them, unemployment is at its highest level in nearly 30 years. This segment of the population encompasses most offenders under CSOSA’s supervision: Only 60 percent of probationers and 53 percent of parolees have finished high school or obtained a GED. With or without a high school diploma, very few will earn the \$11.25 an hour defined by the Council as a living wage.³ Those without are likely to earn significantly less.

According to the Fiscal Policy Institute report, employment among D.C.’s African-American population has declined by more than 10 percent since the late 1980’s. During this same period, the U.S. incarceration rate more than doubled. Today, approximately 2,000 inmates return to the District each year from Federal Bureau of Prisons facilities throughout the country. They return to a tighter labor market in which success depends more than ever on access to education and training. According to the D.C. Workforce Investment Council, 70 percent of the city’s employment is in the knowledge-based “business services” sector (which includes information technology),

¹ Watts, Harold and Demetra Smith Nightingale. “Adding it Up: The Economic Impact of Incarceration on Individuals, Families, and Communities.” Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 1996.

² D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute. *D.C.’s Two Economies: Many Residents Are Falling Behind Despite the City’s Revitalization*. Washington, DC: D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute, October 2007.

³ “Way to Work Amendment Act of 2006,” B16-286, enacted March 23, 2006.

while less than 15 percent is in the construction or hospitality sectors, which are traditionally more accessible to ex-offenders.⁴

CSOSA has entered a number of partnerships with the city to improve offenders' access to training and education. We are working with the University of the District of Columbia on a pilot program to begin job training during incarceration and continue it after release. We provided a staff liaison to the One-Stop Reentry Service Center to work with the Department of Employment Services' Project Empowerment Program. We continue to work with the city's faith institutions to increase access to faith-based job readiness and training opportunities. Despite these initiatives, the need for job training and placement exceeds the availability of opportunities. In FY 2007, just under half of the offenders under supervision were unemployed at any given time.

Employment is strongly linked to successful supervision outcomes and reduced recidivism. The U.S. Department of Labor's Ready4Work program has achieved a one-year recidivism rate that is 44 percent lower than the national average.⁵ Among CSOSA's caseload, employed offenders are twice as likely to maintain a successful supervision status as unemployed offenders.

Offenders face many barriers to a good job: lack of education and skills, poor work histories, employers' unwillingness to hire an individual with a criminal record. To these impediments must be added the reality and enormous cost of drug addiction. In 2002, the Office of National Drug Control Policy estimated that drug abuse cost the American economy over \$180 billion, including \$36 billion in criminal justice and social welfare system costs.⁶

CSOSA data indicate that 70 percent of individuals under supervision have a history of drug abuse. In order to address this issue more effectively, in November of 2007 The White House Office of National Drug Control Policy announced a grant for \$10.5 million for the District of Columbia. The grant, part of the President's Access to Recovery Program (ATR), will provide treatment to individuals reentering the

⁴ D.C. Workforce Investment Council 2003 data.

⁵ Reported on the U.S. Department of Labor web site (<http://www.dol.gov/cfbci/reentry.htm#ready4work>).

⁶ Office of National Drug Control Policy. *The Economic Costs of Drug Abuse in the United States, 1992-2002*, Executive Summary. Washington, DC: Executive Office of the President, 2004.

community from the correctional system as well as those involved with the child welfare system. ATR is administered by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and has nearly doubled drug treatment funding for the District of Columbia.

CSOSA's treatment resources are necessarily targeted toward those offenders who pose the highest risk to public safety. We also refer offenders to the city's Addiction Prevention and Recovery Administration (APRA) for treatment services. We are currently working on coordinating our assessment process with APRA's to streamline the referral process.

Substance abuse, crime, and poverty are inextricably connected. We know that treatment plays an integral role in interrupting this cycle and restoring economic vitality. Locally, I would like to see both increased treatment capacity for the criminal justice population and sanctions-based treatment programs that provides an alternative placement for offenders who face re-incarceration for substance abuse violations.

Although employment assistance and drug treatment are essential components of any anti-poverty strategy, they will not succeed without addressing an even more fundamental concern: housing. Offenders who do not have stable living situations are less likely to succeed on supervision. They are more likely to lose contact with their Community Supervision Officer. Every day, several hundred offenders on supervision sleep in shelters because there is no alternative.

The District's shortage of affordable housing is well documented. For offenders, this problem makes everything else a lot harder: It can necessitate transferring their case to another jurisdiction. It can complicate work arrangements and compliance with drug testing, office visits, or program requirements. It can undo months of abstinence attained during treatment. It reduces the number of collateral contacts for the Community Supervision Officer and makes it impossible to complete a home visit with the police, one of our most effective supervision tools. In short, housing instability increases the offender's risk to public safety.

In the coming months, the District's new Office of Ex-Offender Affairs will become fully operational. I look forward to working with this office as it establishes

community partnerships and improves collaboration with District agencies. Having a central point within the District government for offender related policy development and resource management will be helpful. I also hope this office will also work closely with the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council and the Re-Entry Steering Committee.

This weekend marks the beginning of our sixth annual reentry observance. The city has been our valued partner in this endeavor from its inception. Mr. Chairman, I invite you and your colleagues to come out to some of the scheduled activities and join us in raising awareness of the challenges offenders face.

I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.