

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY AND PUBLIC SAFETY  
COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
COUNCILMEMBER CHARLES ALLEN, CHAIR  
BUDGET OVERSIGHT HEARINGS  
9:30 A.M. 29 MARCH 2018

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Washington, D. C. 20005

Chairperson Allen and members of the Committee, we appreciate the opportunity to testify today. We are Malcolm C. Young, Project Director for Project New Opportunity (PNO), and Norman Brown, Deputy Project Director.

At PNO, Reentry Consultants, have been providing advice and counsel to federally-sentenced individuals released by the BOP from prisons all over the country to three federal districts. The majority of our current Reentry Consultants were themselves once incarcerated. Whenever possible, we start to work with clients six months in advance of release. We have been able to overcome the challenges presented by the distance between our clients and ourselves and the locations to which they wish to return.

Because one of the three federal districts is the Eastern District of Virginia, we have a number of clients returning to the District of Columbia and Maryland. More of our clients are released through the BOP's contract halfway house in the District, Hope Village, so we deal with the reality of that facility as well as other aspects of the BOP's approach to reentry. We have observed reentry programming here in the District as well as in Philadelphia and Chicago, the other areas where we are working. PNO is a member of the Reentry Action Network (RAN).

My testimony is focused on the fiscal or budgetary aspects of reentry programs in the District of Columbia.

The District government is improving reentry services, and is to be commended for doing so.

In a significant step, the District government has established the "Portal" to assist D. C. Residents returning from the Department of Corrections. PNO staff were pleased to learn that the Portal's recently hired staff are developing referral and case management protocols with the D. C. Department of Corrections on one end and are making plans to work with community-based reentry programs and services on the other.

When operational, the Portal stands to benefit returning citizens. It will provide direct assistance to returning citizens by the various agency staff positioned at the Portal. It is also expected to increase referrals and requests for assistance coming to the Mayor's Office for Returning Citizen's Affairs (MORCA) and to the programs now funded by the Office of Victim's Services and Justice Grants (OVSJG). There are about nine of these programs, funded by grants totaling roughly \$1M. The concern has to be that increased referrals and requests for assistance will strain the resources of these nine programs as well as programs operating on independent, contributed or charitable funds, or as volunteers.

At present, even before there is an increase in referrals, those resources are demonstrably insufficient to handle the number of clients who need their services.

According to a September 2017 report prepared for the District of Columbia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, for a year period between 1 October 2014 to 30 September 2015 at least 4,963 individuals were released to the street from DOC custody, with another 485 released to one or another treatment program, for a total of 5,448 or on average 454 individuals per month released by the DOC to the street, or presumably soon to be on the street after treatment.<sup>1</sup> That's almost exactly as many as the 460 returning citizens that, according to the Reentry Action Network, were supported by the nine recipients of OVSJG grants in all twelve months of 2017.

Not every individual leaving DOC needs reentry services. But clearly a capacity to assist *only one twelfth*, or 8% of all citizens returning from the DOC is inadequate. The situation is even worse when you consider the likelihood that service in some areas of need, notably mental health, may be grossly inadequate for the number of returning citizens needing those services. Nor do these numbers include citizens returning from the BOP to whom several of the OVSJG grantees provide services.

PNO joins in recommendations to significantly increase OVSJG's budget for grants to reentry programing and to expand reentry services in the District generally.

We also have a specific recommendation.

At PNO, our concern has been with the reentry support for D. C. residents returning from the BOP each year. According to the previously-mentioned report and in the same year 1,610 returning citizens with a Washington, D.C. address left the BOP for supervision in a halfway house, home supervision, or to the authority of CSOSA. Another 200 were released on parole. In total, releases from the BOP to Washington, D.C. averaged 150 per month.

A small number of these receive reentry support from OVSJG grant-funded programs such as Free Minds Book Club which is actively engaged with individuals in the BOP. Some receive mental health services from University Legal Services, and one other OVSG grant funded program.

But almost none of the 150 District citizens released by BOP receive individual guidance or counseling in advance of release. This is an important lack as more than one-third of the individuals released by BOP did not go through the BOP's contract halfway house system. These individuals will not be served by the Portal. Soon, they may have a difficult time accessing reentry programs in the District which will be handling an increased DOC caseload.

Their need for reentry support is greater, because District residents released by BOP have been away from home and family for, on average 2 ½ years. They were convicted of felony offenses

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<sup>1</sup> "Final Report, District of Columbia Custodial Population Study" prepared for the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council by Justice Research and Statistics Association and The Moss Group, Inc. (September 2017), p. 16 and Table 4. Numbers are conservative as they are based on 8,996 of 10,680 "booking events" in the year-long study period, and they eliminate those individuals released into another agency's custody and therefore not available or appropriate for reentry services from the Portal or a Community Based Organization.

ranging from homicides and aggravated assaults (12.5%), robbery (15.0%), property offenses (14.0%), and drug offenses (37%).<sup>2</sup>

In order to improve reentry services for citizens returning from the BOP without drawing on District resources dedicated to the Portal and to improving reentry from the DOC, PNO proposes additional funding for a pilot program of reentry support for up to 200 D. C. residents returning from the BOP.

Advantages of this proposal to the District government include:

- Reentry assistance to up to 200 prioritized returning citizens, their families and communities.
- By having a proven, replicable program model in place on a pilot basis, the District will have a running start on establishing an effective reentry program for individuals returning from the BOP once it is finished implementing the Portal and making other improvements to reentry for citizens leaving the DOC.
- Demonstration of the efficacy of those provisions of the “Returning Citizens Opportunity to Succeed Amendment Act of 2017” which require that MORCA provide contact information and an offer of certain services six months in advance of a returning citizen’s release from a BOP facility. PNO starts to work with individuals six months before they are transferred from BOP to a halfway house or home confinement except when impossible to do so because an application was made less than six months from the date of release. We think this time in advance of release is a key to our success.
- Demonstration of the effectiveness and cost-savings efficiencies of PNO’s client-centered case management approach to reentry. PNO often succeeds in connecting the returning citizen to an appropriate reentry service or program before he or she is released. This minimizes uncertainty and shortens time before a returning citizen is constructively involved in the community.

In addition, the PNO model utilizes services across the board and across silos. We look for under-utilized resources.

For example, PNO would pursue making more use of CSOSA’s federally-funded resources for its clients. CSOSA may be a gateway to significant resources. In FY 2017, CSOSA provided drug treatment and services for 1,537 contracted-for sessions or services including 837 residential treatments and 574 outpatient contacts. Through its several employment assistance centers, CSOSA provided education and employment assessments to 784 individuals, 499 referrals to “employment opportunities,” and 346 referrals for “vocational training opportunities.” We would work with the staff at CSOSA to obtain more of those resources for citizens returning from the BOP.

The program model PNO proposes is affordable. The program PNO recommends, based on its own model and serving 200 D. C. citizens over two years, would cost \$157,800 for the first year and \$145,100 for the second year.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40-41, Table 12.

We thank you for considering additional budgeting support for the benefit of D. C. residents who will be returning from the Bureau of Prisons. Their lives and our communities would benefit by improved reentry services and support. As important as this is, we do not want to detract from the already-lean funding for existing programs serving principally individuals returning from the DOC. We hope you will address both needs.

We have appended additional information about Project New Opportunity including references to a recently-concluded study that describes unique aspects of our approach to reentry and outcomes.

Respectfully submitted,

  
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Project Director

  
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