

**Testimony of Adrienne Poteat, Deputy 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**

“Female D.C. Code Felons: Unique Challenges in Prison and At Home”

July 27, 2010

Chairman Lynch, Ranking Member Chaffetz, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency’s (CSOSA’s) role in facilitating the successful reentry and community reintegration of District of Columbia women returning from prison.

On any given day, CSOSA supervises 16,000 offenders. Women comprise roughly 15% of our total supervised population, or approximately 2,400 female offenders. Of those women, 20%, or nearly 500 women, returned to the community on parole or supervised release after serving a period of incarceration. The remaining 1,900 women are probationers. Between 2006 and 2009 CSOSA experienced an 18 percent increase in the number of women with post-release supervision obligations. Over the same period the number of men returning to the community with supervision obligations increased by just 7%. Of the 2,324 D.C. Code felons who returned home from prison under CSOSA’s supervision in 2009, 2,104 were men (90.5%) and 222 (9.5%) were women.

The challenges faced by women on community supervision are often exacerbated by a history of sexual, physical, and mental abuse that, in many cases, has gone unaddressed. Twenty-five to 40% of CSOSA’s 2,400 female offenders report having been victimized as a

child; 20% to 30% report victimization as an adult. Further, 6% to 9% report having lived either on the streets, in a shelter, or in a transitional living facility during the most recent six month period; 20% to 40% report having a current housing arrangement that is unstable or temporary; about 45% do not have a diploma or GED, more than 70% are unemployed on any given day; and more than 40% have a dependent child. Half of the women supervised by CSOSA report having been diagnosed with and/or treated for a mental health disorder and nearly 80% self-report a history of illicit drug use.

CSOSA's supervision and treatment interventions are employed based on sound set of proven best practices and on the unique needs of the individual offender. All CSOSA offenders undergo an intensive screening to identify their risk profile and their specific needs. Offenders are assigned to special mental health, domestic violence, sex offender, high risk substance abuse or traffic/alcohol teams as indicated. Our offenders receive a continuum of substance abuse treatment modalities from detox to residential treatment. Mental health assessments and treatment referrals, sex offender treatment, domestic violence treatment, anger management, parenting support, life skills training, employment assistance, transitional housing and vocational support are provided to all offenders based on need. With the exception of services designed specifically for women and placement in our Reentry and Sanctions Center, all services are provided to our offenders without regard to gender. Our gender-specific programming and our plans for the Reentry and Sanctions Center will be addressed later in my testimony.

CSOSA also works closely with the D.C. Department of Corrections' Residential Substance Abuse Treatment Program (RSAT) for those women who will be restored to CSOSA supervision, on probation, parole or supervised release, upon release from Department of Corrections custody. CSOSA meets with RSAT staff to review and implement discharge plans

covering a community-based adjustment period of up to six months. We monitor RSAT female offenders' release and entry into the prescribed community-based treatment modality. CSOSA facilitates meetings with the offender and the treatment provider to review changes and milestones in these offenders' treatment plans. When additional treatment and sanctioning interventions are needed and are not available through the Department of Corrections' provider network, CSOSA will supplement the recommended intervention with a placement at a CSOSA contract vendor treatment program. CSOSA began this effort in October 2009, targeting 18 female offenders who began and eventually completed the initial RSAT 90-day assessment and treatment readiness program at the Correctional Treatment Facility (CTF). All of the women were subsequently placed in community-based treatment services. Some are currently participating in aftercare, some have completed aftercare, and some have become noncompliant.

CSOSA conducts co-ed day, evening and weekend support groups for offenders facilitated by in-house staff and contract vendors. Since 1999 we have also conducted a gender-specific support program for our female offenders. The Women in Control Again (WICA) Program is an integrated psycho-educational therapeutic program for women suffering from substance abuse and mental illness. Participants in the program gain an understanding of the signs and symptoms of drug addiction, the effect of drug addiction on their mental illness and the importance of medication compliance versus self-medication with illegal substances and/or alcohol. The women are also assisted with building social and problem-solving skills. Participation in the WICA program is currently limited to women assigned to our Mental Health Branch.

In addition to the WICA Program, since 2004 we have held an Annual Women's Reentry Forum to increase public awareness of the challenges facing women returning from prison.

Congresswomen Eleanor Holmes Norton served as the keynote speaker for our inaugural event. Forum workshops, facilitated by our community partners, have tackled issues that have included parenting, domestic violence, health and personal care. Each year we conclude the Women's Reentry Forum with a fashion show featuring the residents of the Fairview Halfway House for Women modeling donated apparel. The clothes provide a boost to the women's morale and also provide appropriate apparel for employment interviews.

Last year, Our Place, DC partnered with CSOSA to launch a Reentry Demonstration Project to provide comprehensive pre-release planning to incarcerated women returning to the District of Columbia and to assist those women with managing the multiple obligations they will face upon return to the community. Our Place, DC is a key community partner that assists previously incarcerated women with clothing, transportation subsidies, medical education and job searches. To date, 16 women from the Secure Female Facility at Hazelton, West Virginia and 26 women from the Federal Detention Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, who are going to be under CSOSA supervision, have expressed interest in participating in the Our Place, DC Reentry Demonstration Project. To be eligible, participants must be a female convicted of a felony as an adult, be within 4 months of release and be willing to participate. On June 28th, we conducted our initial videoconference with the women at Hazelton. At that time, we provided an orientation for new recruits and held private interviews with two of the previously enrolled participants. In August, we will hold an initial videoconference with Philadelphia and a follow-up videoconference with Hazelton. Our videoconferences with the women are an outgrowth of our positive experience in conducting video mentoring with male inmates at the Rivers Correctional Institution.

In response to the growing number of female offenders with supervision obligations and the increasing rate of women offenders with co-occurring substance abuse and mental health issues, CSOSA plans to significantly expand the scope of our women's programming with four major initiatives beginning this fall.

The first will be the opening of one 15-bed floor of the Reentry and Sanctions Center (RSC) to female offenders on probation, parole or supervised release. The RSC provides high-risk offenders with a comprehensive clinical assessment and treatment readiness programming. At capacity, CSOSA can provide RSC programming to up to 180 women per year. The outcome of this process will be the development of an individualized treatment plan that outlines a long-term continuum of treatment services that the woman agrees to complete and which the Community Supervision Officer will use to support appropriate and effective supervision. Like the men, many of the women will report to the RSC immediately following their release from prison. Women (including probationers) in the community who begin testing positive for drugs and who meet the program's eligibility criteria can be assigned to the RSC as a supervision sanction, as well. We maintain a network of treatment providers to ensure that appropriate services are readily available upon completion of the RSC program.

The second initiative will be the reorganization of our Mental Health Branch to establish two women-only supervision teams.

The third initiative will be launching of a Day Reporting Center (DRC) exclusively for women. The Women's Day Reporting Center will operate weekdays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. and, like our existing co-ed DRC, will provide a productive alternative to idle time for our unemployed female offenders. Programming will be built around a series of themes specific to

women.. The Day Reporting Center will be staffed by a CSOSA staff. Community-based service providers will provide programming as well.

Finally, the WICA Program is being expanded to provide a more comprehensive package of gender-specific supervision services to women. The target population will be high risk female offenders having at least six months remaining under supervision, being supervised at the intensive and maximum levels, who are suffering from mental health challenges, substance abuse or trauma, and have the propensity to carry out acts of violence or be reconvicted on weapons, sex or drug offenses. Cognitive behavioral therapy will be added to address the negative thinking patterns that trigger criminal behavior and group sessions will be increased from one to two days per week.

We are excited about the potential of these four initiatives to build upon our existing programming for women and contribute to the successful reintegration of our female offenders. This concludes my testimony. Again, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am prepared to answer any questions you may have.