

## **STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN STEPHEN F. LYNCH**

### **SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL WORKFORCE, POSTAL SERVICE, AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA HEARING**

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

Tuesday July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2010

Ladies and gentlemen, let me welcome you to the Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, Postal Service and the District of Columbia’s oversight hearing, entitled “Female D.C. Code Felons: Unique Challenges in Prison and At Home.” Today’s hearing gives the Subcommittee the opportunity to examine the distinct challenges commonly faced by female D.C. Code felons, such as regaining custody of their children, maintaining and managing complex social relationships, and generally reintegrating back into society.

There are roughly 250 female D.C. code felons, scattered up and down the east coast in various federal prisons. In terms of placement, Bureau of Prisons generally houses D.C. female inmates at facilities in nine states and the District of Columbia, with the majority residing in Connecticut, Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

There are several issues that arise relating to female D.C. Code felons. These challenges range from ease of access to Bureau of Prison programs, to the difficulty of keeping D.C. Code felons connected to their families and community resources. While the Subcommittee has previously explored some of these concerns as they pertain to the D.C. male offenders specifically, today’s oversight hearing is intended to discuss how these issues impact D.C. female offenders.

Female D.C. Code felons face a myriad of different problems than do their male counterparts. For one, children play a much larger role in the lives of female offenders. Studies show incarcerated women exhibit high levels of attachment with their children and are more likely than men to live with their minor children both pre and post incarceration. This attachment makes separation from their children among the most damaging aspects of prison-life for women. Furthermore, the lack of contact can have a profound negative effect on these women’s emotional and psychological state. In light of this finding, the Bureau of Prisons, much to their credit has taken steps to alleviate some of these drawbacks by offering classes on parenting, managing incarceration and increased communication. However, these services are not available at all Bureau of Prison facilities, and certainly not at all facilities where female D.C. Code felons are housed.

After release, poverty plays a large role in many ex-felon’s lives. According to a Bureau of Justice Statistics report, 37% of female felons had incomes of less than \$600 per month, prior to arrest.

In addition to economic challenges, many female felons suffer from physical abuse, sexually-transmitted diseases, and drug abuse. Therefore, it is clear that more needs to be done to ensure the successful re-entry of these women. To that end, this hearing seeks to review the ways in which the Bureau of Prisons, the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency, various local agencies, and community service providers are working, collaboratively, to address the unique needs of female D.C. Code felons both while imprisoned and after release.

I'd like to thank my colleague, Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton for her tireless work in this policy area. The Subcommittee looks forward to working with you as we continue to work with various federal agencies tasked with carrying out what is traditionally a local governing function.

Again, I thank all those in attendance this afternoon and I look forward to hearing the testimony of our witnesses.

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