

STATEMENT

OF

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BEFORE THE

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE,
POSTAL SERVICE AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

MAY 5, 2010

Good afternoon Chairman Lynch, Ranking Member Chaffetz, Congresswoman Norton, and Members of the Subcommittee. I am pleased to appear before you today at this hearing to examine the impact of housing D.C. inmates far from home. As the Deputy Director of the federal agency responsible for supervising approximately 16,000 men and women under community supervision in Washington, D.C., and as a former Warden with the D.C. Department of Corrections, I know firsthand that the foundation for an individual's successful reentry can be laid during time spent in prison. If credible opportunities for treatment, education and occupational training are available and taken advantage of, and if comprehensive release planning and preparation can be accomplished, a person can leave prison with a real chance to pursue a positive and constructive way of life.

Approximately 6,000 D.C. Code inmates are now serving their sentences in the Federal Bureau of Prison's (BOP) facilities around the country. Since our agency was established in August 2000, incarcerated men and women have returned to the District of Columbia and CSOSA's supervision at the rate of about 2,200 per year.

CSOSA's specialized Transitional Intervention for Parole Supervision (TIPS) teams are primarily responsible for facilitating an inmate's return home. TIPS provides reentry services to inmates who transition from prison through a Residential Reentry Center to community supervision, as well as to those released directly from a BOP facility to the community. BOP case managers submit a release plan to CSOSA that includes the inmate's proposed living arrangement and, when available, their potential employment. The TIPS Community Supervision Officers (CSO) investigate these release plans to ensure they are conducive to successful reentry and do not pose a risk to the community. TIPS reports back to the BOP on the viability of the proposed release plans. In all cases, TIPS CSOs prepare a transition report utilizing all the information available that will guide the initial work of the CSO assigned to the case for ongoing supervision. This may include the individual's substance abuse history, criminal behavior patterns, history of violence or aggression, educational or vocational deficits or physical or mental health challenges.

On any given day, about 6,400 of the 16,000 men and women under CSOSA's supervision are either on parole or supervised release. Most have long histories of substance abuse, educational underachievement and underemployment. More

specifically, 80 to 90% of this population reports a history of illicit drug use. Both groups have lower rates of high school or GED completion; 41% and 50% respectively. Only 40% of these reentrants report stable housing arrangements upon intake. Only 38% of the parolees and 27% of the supervised releasees are employed. Many men and women returning home face challenges with family reunification or with establishing pro-social relationships that offer companionship and support. These conditions can have a significant impact on the stability and success of community supervision. Our CSOs endeavor to help the reentrants they supervise address these challenges, through counseling and appropriate referrals to resource and service providers as well as mentors. However, it is well recognized in our field that when effective work on these matters can be undertaken during the period of incarceration, the prospect for successful reentry is increased. It was toward that end, back in 2003, that CSOSA launched an initiative at the Rivers Correctional Institution in Winton, NC to work collaboratively with the BOP and the prison's management and staff to enhance D.C. inmates' release preparation.

We chose to work with Rivers because of the large number of D.C. inmates there and its proximity to the District of Columbia. When we first visited the facility, there were over 1100 D.C. inmates housed there. As such, it produced the largest stream of individuals returning home to D.C. In addition, Rivers' location, approximately 225 miles from the District, made it fairly accessible in about a four-hour drive. Though today Rivers' population of D.C. inmates is much smaller, hovering between 500 and 600 on any given day, that still, by far, constitutes the largest single concentration of D.C. inmates at any facility within the federal prison system. While there are a few BOP

facilities closer to the District (such as FCI Petersburg and FCI Cumberland), their D.C. populations are about half that of Rivers. We targeted our efforts at Rivers because we saw we could reach the most people there. We quickly began using videoconferencing technology to close the distance between us, saving time and increasing productivity.

Our work at Rivers began with the CSOSA Faith Community Partnership's implementation of Video Mentoring to link inmates nearing release with faith-based mentors who provided pre-release encouragement and assistance and post-release support. We later developed Community Resource Day, a quarterly videoconference to provide inmates nearing release with information from local government, faith-based and non-profit service providers about housing, health care, education, and employment. From the onset, the response has been positive with inmates consistently telling us that these programs give them hope which they did not have before.

Our Video Mentoring Program was an extension of an existing effort started the previous year where volunteer mentors recruited from local faith institutions were matched with reentrants transitioning through the Residential Reentry Centers (halfway houses). We believed that by making matches prior to release, we could better prepare the mentees for release. We arranged for the mentors and mentees to meet by videoconference to implement an individualized reentry plan laying the foundation for post-release life. Mentors assembled for the sessions in our Training and Career Development Center. The mentees would report to a small room in the prison used to conduct parole hearings. CSOSA purchased and placed videoconferencing systems at

both locations to facilitate the transmissions. The mentors provided their mentees with support and guidance regarding job development, locating stable housing and establishing new, more positive leisure time activities and friendships. Mentees' family members and partners were frequent participants in video mentoring sessions.

D.C. inmates meeting the program's eligibility criteria were invited to participate. They were scheduled for an assessment interview by CSOSA staff that was conducted by videoconference. The interview enabled us to determine whether a mentee lacked a support system and a mentor could be helpful. It also helped us determine the mentee's needs and set forth specific goals in a plan for the mentoring relationship. Once a match was made and the video mentoring sessions began, they continued bi-weekly until the mentee was released. After release, mentors and mentees would continue to meet at least monthly for a minimum of six months.

We suspended the video mentoring program in 2007 after expanding the scope of the community-based mentoring program to include men and women on probation. This substantially increased the demand for mentors and quickly exhausted our available pool. Priority for a mentor match was given to mentees already under supervision in the community where the benefit to public safety was more immediate. Later this year, however, we expect to resume the use of videoconferencing to facilitate release preparation. The focus will be on female inmates at the BOP's Secure Women's Facility at Hazelton, West Virginia who are participating in Our Place D.C.'s reentry demonstration pilot.

In October 2004, our videoconferencing technology was put to a new and broader use at Rivers as we began delivering information on District-based resources and services to groups of 200+ offenders scheduled to return home within the next 90 days.

Presentations covering housing, health care, education and employment were delivered by representatives from CSOSA, the District of Columbia government, and several faith-based and community-based non-profit organizations. The inmates were given the opportunity to ask all of the presenters questions. Each inmate was provided with a packet of handouts from the presenters on the subject matter that they covered. The packets essentially serve as personal resource guides upon release.

This pioneering development was made possible when Rivers' former Warden, George Snyder, agreed to our request to have the institution's visiting hall wired for videoconference interactions. That step enabled us to begin communicating with large groups of inmates, rather than just the individuals or small groups that were possible during our video mentoring program.

We had initially piloted Community Resource Day earlier in 2004 by transporting teams of resource and service providers to Rivers by bus. We undertook this initial effort in response to a request from Rivers' Assistant Warden for Programs, David Farmer. Mr. Farmer was seeking to enhance the institution's existing Release Preparation Program, which provided generic information to inmates about life skills, personal finance and job readiness. The information package that we developed, built upon that foundation by

enabling the inmates to meet and hear directly from the very resource and service providers they might need to turn to for assistance after arriving home.

Conducting the Community Resource Day presentations by videoconference allowed us to expand the number of providers able to participate. We found several organizations that were unable to permit staff to devote a day or more to travel to Rivers. Now, it just takes a couple of hours for each presenter to come to our office and share their valuable information with the inmates.

The structure and basic content of the day-long Community Resource Day program has remained largely unchanged over the years. The morning segment includes a representative of the U.S. Parole Commission covering issues involving Parole and Supervised Release. Representatives from either the BOP or Hope Village Residential Reentry Center cover rules and procedures surrounding halfway house placements. Those speakers are followed by our TIPS and General Supervision CSOs covering their activities and services. They are followed by a panel addressing topics related to Family Strengthening and Support such as marriage, domestic violence, fatherhood and child support. After lunch, our faith community partners talk about their mentoring and other services. Next, Job Training, Development and Placement are addressed by organizations including the Excel Institute, D.C. Central Kitchen, Community Empowerment Training Academy, Opportunities Industrialization Center, Goodwill, SOME and the D.C. Department of Employment Services. Representatives from the D.C. Office of the State Superintendent of Education and the Community College of the

District of Columbia cover Education. Following that, Housing is addressed by representatives from the Housing Counseling Service and Jubilee Housing. Finally, Unity Health Care and the D.C. HIV/AIDS Administration cover Health Care Services. Surveys completed by both participating inmates and providers consistently document a high level of satisfaction with this program. Last fall, with the cooperation of the BOP, we were able to develop and distribute a Community Resource Day DVD Package for utilization by D.C. inmates at all of the prisons within the BOP system. While it does not offer the direct interaction with resource and service providers that is the hallmark of the Rivers experience, it, nonetheless, empowers the inmates to find the help they need.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to participate in today's hearing and present information about CSOSA's activities. I look forward to answering any questions you may have for me.