

Testimony of
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September 21, 2006

Chairman Coburn, Senator Durbin and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me here today to testify on federal assistance for prisoner reentry.

Every year, more than 650,000 ex-offenders are released from America's state and federal prisons, often arriving on the doorsteps of our nation's communities without a place to call home. Studies show that approximately two-thirds of ex-offenders are rearrested within three years of release, and that the crimes they commit during this period come at great expense to affected communities.

To help ex-offenders stay away from crime, a substantial number of faith-based and community organizations (FBCOs) have created comprehensive programs addressing the myriad challenges faced by this population. Working with a broad coalition of public and private partners, these organizations provide job training and placement services, housing options, and transitional services like mentoring support that help ex-offenders contribute to their communities, rebuild their lives, and stay out of prison.

In his 2004 State of the Union address, President Bush proposed a four-year \$300 million Prisoner Re-Entry Initiative (PRI) to reduce recidivism and help ex-offenders contribute to their communities through a federal partnership between the Departments of Justice, Labor and Housing and Urban Development. The objective of the Initiative is to harness the resources and experience faith-based and community organizations bring to the table. By relying on the strengths, experience and community ties of these organizations, along with the resources of the Federal government, ex-offenders would be better assisted and have a greater opportunity to rebuild their lives and develop the social and vocational skills necessary to become productive citizens.

The four-year Prisoner Re-Entry Initiative (PRI) is designed to provide training and job-placement services, transitional housing and mentoring to non-violent ex-offenders. To date, the PRI targets program resources to those urban communities most heavily affected by returning ex-offenders. It funds experienced FBCOs with the proven capacity to administer grant activities and leverage the resources of FBCOs and other public and private agencies already involved in providing these services.

On November 8, 2005, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) awarded 30 grants to FBCOs to develop an employment-centered program that incorporates mentoring, job training, and other transitional services to the returning ex-offenders. The Department of Justice (DOJ) subsequently

awarded grants to state agencies to provide pre-release assessment, programming and services, transition planning, and post-release supervision and coordination of services for prisoners returning to communities served by DOL grants. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) will also assist in the design and implementation of the Initiative in the areas of substance abuse and mental health treatment through the Access to Recovery Program.

A crucial component of a successful Prisoner Re-Entry Initiative is providing housing. Many ex-offenders need a place to reside immediately upon release from prison - at a minimum on a temporary basis, and HUD can provide the transitional housing needed with relevant supportive services. The Department is capable of providing this critical assistance to achieve the objectives of the Initiative as well, but to date has not received any of its requested funding for the PRI.

HUD's \$25M budget request each year for fiscal years 2005, 2006 and 2007 would have funded transitional housing as a key component of the PRI. Under such funding, eligible activities would have been limited to acquisitions, minor rehabilitation (e.g. reconfiguring a doorway for handicap accessibility), leasing, operating costs, and approximately 5% in limited administrative costs.

PRI funding is needed because HUD lacks the requisite authority to use other sources of funding for the discharge planning of individuals from institutions, or even for homeless prevention. The Administration proposal would make it possible for HUD to fund grantees providing housing specifically for ex-offenders who are not defined as homeless.

Given that adequate housing is an important component of successful reentry into society for ex-offenders, HUD respectfully urges the Congress to provide \$25 million for the PRI this year, consistent with President Bush's FY2007 budget request. These funds would be used in heavily targeted areas or multiple jurisdictions, so as to alleviate the possibilities of funds dilution and high administrative overhead. These funds would be made competitively available to faith-based and community-based organizations with proven capacity for addressing the special needs of the ex-offender population.

We would also urge Congress to maintain funding for PRI for our federal partners. Both the House and Senate Appropriations Committees have reported out bills that contain no funding for the Department of Labor's portion of the initiative for FY07, and the Housing and Urban Development piece has not been funded to date. We regret this development and continue to believe that a multifaceted-approach, utilizing the full resources of all our federal partners consistent with the President's FY07 budget request, is the best way to effectuate real change.

Thank you very much and I am pleased to answer any questions you may have.