

Senate Judiciary Committee
Hearing on “The Nation's Correctional
Staffing Crisis: Assessing the Toll on
Correctional Officers and Incarcerated Persons”
March 10, 2024
RESPONSE to Questions for the Record

ORIGINAL QUESTION: For Ms. Santia Nance, Impacted Person and Co-Founder, Sistas in Prison Reform

For many years, Senator Cornyn and I have led the One Stop Shop Community Reentry Program Act to help former inmates reintegrate into their communities by creating resource centers that will help them find jobs, housing, mental health services, and substance abuse treatment.

- *Are there other steps Congress can take to help incarcerated individuals prepare for this transition?*

RESPONSE BY SANTIA NANCE:

Hello Senator Amy Klobuchar,

Thank for your work helping current and former incarcerated people, and for your thoughtful question.

In my experience, I have noticed that the re-entry process has potential to be done MUCH earlier in the process during incarceration. In Virginia, the best programs don't become available until you're at 2 years or below prior to release, which means that there are thousands of incarcerated people who are not eligible for re-entry programming. They are also subject to be wait-listed due to a limited number of spots, and waiting to be transferred to lower-level facilities where most of those programs are offered.

My loved one, Quadaire, who received a 20-year sentence, initiated early rehabilitation on his own, as there were no progressive programs available to him earlier in his incarceration due to how much time he had left to serve.

He spent his time reading as many books as he could and studied meditation and tai chi. He has offered advice and leadership on these subjects (although most of it is informal) and he organizes programs and events for those in his facility, and others in Virginia through Brilliance Behind Bars (a website I manage that gives incarcerated folks a chance to write essays). Since we reconnected, I was able to get

him enrolled at Ohio University taking print-based classes, and this was the icing on the cake for him as he felt so much more empowered, capable, and ready for society.

In the past he has said ‘Most people are in here because we didn’t understand society and how it works, and we lacked education.’ A lot of the incarcerated populations are there due to being poor and without a stable environment. Access to higher education could give them a sense of control of their lives moving forward, along with something to hold their attention and give them hope and focus. This could go beyond classes, but even offering more extracurricular and interest-based clubs and organizations, just like universities. It would allow them to see the world better and allow a true adjustment to society as a returning citizen.

While it’s understood that there are SOME higher education opportunities available for few, it should be a true option for all incarcerated people at all points of their confinement. I always like to say – what if we sent people who committed crimes to college instead of prison? How much better would our country truly be?

Thank you again for your question. Please do not hesitate to reach out with further questions.

Santia Nance

