

Statement by

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Hearing on

Reauthorization of the Second Chance

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Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Gohmert and Members of the Subcommittee, I thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on a matter of Reauthorizing the Second Chance Act. The Richmond City Sheriff's Office in the City of Richmond, Virginia was one of fifteen (15) localities to receive the 2009 Second Chance Adult Demonstrations Grant. Under the leadership of Sheriff C.T. Woody Jr., we have had the privilege of providing our returning citizens with evidenced based, comprehensive and individualized case management because of the Second Chance Act.

The Richmond City Jail's total daily inmate population averages fourteen hundred or more (1400+), but the facility was built to hold less than nine hundred (900). The Second Chance Act has allowed our team to effectively address the root causes of a high recidivism rate and overcrowding among the disproportionate number of offenders that are returning to the Richmond community. We have been able to provide a sustainable and relevant reentry program, with our pilot focusing on thirty (30) year old male and female inmates. While addressing the high criminality across generations, often correlated with poverty and separated families, our program has focused on treatment of the whole person. The approach has made a much wider impact, not only reducing recidivism and improving quality of life among the inmates but also among their family members, and, consequently, the larger community.

The City of Richmond has been able to effectively partner with local government agencies, community-based service providers to assist ex-offenders with issues surrounding substance abuse, homelessness, mental and physical health, unemployment, educational challenges and family instability. Our three pronged approach of Getting Ready, Going Home and Staying Home consist of integrated pre and post release services that include substance abuse treatment, transitional housing options, connections to

mental and physical health services, GED and vocational education, responsible financial management and job readiness skills training as well as mentoring and family reunification services.

It is quite a sight to see an inmate who arrived at the jail coming down off a binge of drugs and alcohol, homeless, jobless and not supporting his family in any way to leave a recovering addict, equipped with a GED, and a vocational training certificate. They are prepared to work hard, manage money, pay restitution, and become a leader in his home. As I am sure some cynics would believe this is unrealistic, the leadership development program has graduated twenty one (21) participants with only one (1) returning to jail or prison. It was our community partnership and the Second Chance Act that has allowed these partnerships and programs to continue in our jail.

Through the Second Chance Act, the Richmond Jail and our close community partners have been able to collaboratively design and implement a comprehensive reentry model that uses risk and need assessments to link our returning citizens to much needed services at each of the various stages of reentry. We now have the capacity to provide a continuum of services as well as maintain close contact with both the program participants and service providers to ensure successful service delivery and performance measurement tracking.

The success of our program is evidenced by our recent work with a forty-five year old woman who, at age eight (8), was drugged by her father and used for child prostitution. Coming to us with only a third grade education, she can now stand before a room of her peers and program staff to confidently articulate her well thought out transition plan that consists of supportive services provided by our Second Chance Act program.

We are confident the reauthorization of the Second Chance Act will enable the production of increased positive outcomes among this disadvantaged and high risk population. With reauthorization lies the ability to replicate this model into other areas of Virginia with similar demographics and risk profile. The idea is to continually maximize efficiencies among collaborative partners as the model expands, developing increased options for this population to become hard working, personally responsible, tax-paying and law-abiding citizens. This will virtually ensure stronger families and safer communities.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for including me in this valuable discussion.