



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

THE ROLE OF THE U.S. PAROLE COMMISSION:

*INCREASING PUBLIC SAFETY, REDUCING RECIDIVISM, AND USING
ALTERNATIVES TO RE-INCARCERATION IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA*

TESTIMONY OF

Cornell Jones

Board Chairman

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THE RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE CHAMBERS

Good Afternoon Chairman Congressman Lynch, Congressman Chaffetz and Congresswoman Norton. My name is Cornell Jones and I am the Board Chairman of Returning Citizens United, Inc. Returning Citizens United (RCU) is an organization that represents the more than 60,000 ex-offenders (returning citizens) who reside in the District of Columbia. RCU performs advocacy and lobbying activities to address the lack of opportunities among this community and support for brothers and sisters committed to change. One initiative that is a priority of our advocacy is to advocate for the removal of the stigma that is associated with being known as “ex-offenders”. Thus, RCU has been advocating the change of the idiom to “returning citizens”.

I also serve as the Executive Director of Miracle Hands CDC where I provide both leadership and managerial oversight for the program, extending its reach and its ability to improve the long-term success rate of re-integration for the formally incarcerated.

Miracle Hands (MH) is a non-profit, tax-exempt 501(c) (3) organization located in wards 4, 5 and 8 of the District of Columbia. Miracle Hands was established in 1998 with a mission to address the multiple socio-economic needs of marginalized populations with a specific focus on returning citizens and at-risk youth.

I have spent nearly 30 years under the criminal justice system from 1974 up until 2001 as a ward of the Parole Commission. During that time, especially while seeking release, the Parole Commission was very difficult to work with. If you have any questions regarding this I can provide further explanation.

I appear before you today to provide testimony on the plight that continually hinders the successful transition in the District of Columbia of these individuals back into their

communities as it relates to parole. There are several issues that are of concern, but today I would like to focus on the following:

1) Refusal by USPC to allow people awaiting parole revocation to remain at home (continuing jobs, housing, etc.): People whose parole is revoked are first arrested and held for probable cause hearings within a few days (in arrested in DC). These hearings almost always result in a finding of probable cause, resulting in detention for at least two (usually 2-4) months waiting for parole revocation hearings at the Jail and designation to the BOP. Despite authority to allow these individuals to remain at liberty pending the revocation hearing, the USPC does not exercise this authority.

- There are currently 601 people on the process of parole revocation at the DC jail facilities, about 20 percent of the total population and the highest percentage on record.
- DC imprisons (in the BOP) more people on parole revocations (over 2,000) than for new felony offenses (1,501 in 2008).

2) Revocations after an arrest: People on parole who are arrested for any minor charge (driving on suspended license, “resisting arrest,” disorderly conduct, etc.) are commonly revoked, even if charges are dropped or if they are acquitted after trial.

The USPC claims that, due to its lower standard of proof, it can still revoke parole, yet a court has either not prosecuted these claims or has acquitted them.

- A “dirty urine” is the best example: there is no charge under the judicial system, no conviction, yet the majority of parolees are sent back to prison for

this mishap in lifestyle when it is driven by an addiction that needs to be treated.¹

3) Appeals within the graduated sanctions system: There is no appeal process for any sanction imposed by CSOSA. The so-called "graduated sanctions" system is supposed to mean that supervision is stepped up as a result of infractions, with GPS monitoring and twice-weekly meetings near the top of the sanctions (short of the "halfway back" program or the sanctions meetings).

4) Parole releases. The *Sellmon v. Reilly* decision will result in hundreds of additional, long-term prisoners coming home to DC in the next 18 months. It does not appear that CSOSA is aware of this (beyond what our organization has informed them) or that the USPC has taken any steps to insure that there are services available to them. This is a particularly difficult group, most incarcerated at least 15 years, who will need help with housing, employment, drug treatment, health care, etc.

Having been in the system for nearly 30 years, I have both observed and experienced changes in certain aspects of U.S. Parole, but one factor has not changed, which is the lack of resources available to returning citizens. With the *Sellmon v. Reilly* decision, it is my contention that the U.S. Parole Commission will need resources with the essential aim of reconnecting parolees with their community and families by aiding them through the provision of case management, individual counseling, domestic violence prevention services, life skills/job readiness activities to ensure economic stability, and most importantly housing. The key objectives should include assisting parolees with finding and maintaining viable employment

and enhancing their skill levels to help them become increasingly productive throughout their lives.

The Parole Commission, under the leadership of Chairman Fulwood, has shared its interest in innovation to meet the needs of this population. I personally was arrested by Mr. Fulwood during my last arrest, and I have witnessed the community-oriented approach that he has shown through his presence at community forums, meetings and other community-based activities. Still, without the necessary resources to address the basic life needs of returning citizens-housing, employment, and the lack of coordination among substance abuse, mental health, and other health treatment services, the same barriers to public safety will remain.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I look forward to continuing to work with your committee and the community on this very important matter and I would be pleased to respond to any questions that you may have of me at this time.

Thank you.