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**Statement of the Council for Court Excellence
Before the Committee on Public Safety and the Judiciary
of the Council of the District of Columbia**

**Budget Oversight Hearing for the
Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants**

June 11, 2021

Good morning, Chairman Allen and members of the committee. My name is Casey Anderson, and I am the Communications Manager for the Council for Court Excellence (CCE). CCE is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization with the mission to enhance justice in the District of Columbia. For nearly 40 years, CCE has worked to improve the administration of justice in the courts and related agencies in D.C. through research and policy analysis, facilitating collaboration and convening diverse stakeholders, and creating educational resources for the public. Per our policy, no judicial member of CCE participated in the preparation of today's testimony.

The Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants (OVSJG) plays an invaluable role in the District, funding critical services to people entangled in the justice system and supporting research and policy innovation. OVSJG grant funds have enabled CCE to support a wide variety of system stakeholders as they work to build better justice for the District. In FY21, CCE provided management support and technical assistance to the District Task Force on Jails & Justice (Task Force). This work would not have been possible without funding from OVSJG and the recommendations I am proposing today are all based on the Task Force's work.

As this committee knows, OVSJG's grant to collect community feedback on the District's needs and priorities surrounding a potential new jail is what allowed CCE to create the District Task Force on Jails & Justice in 2019. The Task Force

includes interdisciplinary leaders from across D.C. and individuals with lived experiences in the justice system. With FY20 and FY21 funding from OVSJG, CCE, along with our partner, The National Reentry Network for Returning Citizens, completed Phase II of this vital initiative in February. The Phase II report, [*Jails & Justice: Our Transformation Starts Today*](#) comes at a critical time, as the District grapples with long-standing issues within its criminal justice system that have been highlighted by the pandemic and protests for racial justice. It is a comprehensive 10-year plan to help D.C. invest in safe communities and to lower incarceration rates by half. It also proposes steps to regain local control over D.C.'s criminal justice system and to create one new nontraditional facility that would house all people still detained pre-trial or sentenced to incarceration. The Task Force explicitly targeted its recommendations to help end the over-criminalization of Black people in the District.

Today, I want to highlight several recommendations that are directly relevant to OVSJG's budget. We must begin investing in these big ideas now to ensure they are implemented before we build a new correctional facility.

As you heard from our community partners at the D.C. Reentry Action Network, funding and supporting community-based organizations that provide reentry services is vital for individuals returning home from incarceration as well as the communities in which they live. We want to thank the Mayor for restoring the one-time \$380,000 in the FY21 budget and making it recurring in the FY22 proposed budget. This continued investment in reentry services puts the District on a path to fulfilling the Task Force's ultimate recommendation of allocating an additional \$15 million to OVSJG over the next eight years. We urge the D.C. Council to designate some of the FY22 OVSJG funds to expand peer support and mentoring opportunities for returning citizens at community-based organizations. For additional context, the Task Force estimates that one full-time peer role with salary, benefits, and training costs about \$75,000. A diversity of employment positions could be funded with this budget, including some in careers governed by D.C.'s new occupational licensing law.

Second, D.C. must continue to expand the use of the housing-first model among reentry housing providers. CCE understands the critical role that stable, supportive housing plays in a person's reentry outcomes and echoes reentry service providers' calls for increased reentry housing in the District. The Task Force estimates that housing-first models serving returning citizens in D.C. cost approximately \$36,000 per year, per person. CCE recommends an increased investment in reentry housing with a specific focus on the housing-first model. We also recommend that, beginning in FY22, D.C. Council should allocate additional, recurring funding for locally-funded housing vouchers and allocate both locally-funded and federally-funded housing vouchers for development projects.

Finally, CCE is excited to see the District investing more funding in violence interrupters and community-led restorative and transformative justice work. In order to more meaningfully support this work, CCE joins the Task Force in recommending allocating funding for the creation of a restorative justice community center to provide space for these initiatives. It is important to begin planning now so that this initiative can be adequately funded in FY23, as recommended by the Task Force.

The diverse work supported by OVSJG is invaluable and brings a vital, trauma-informed, community-based lens to the District. CCE is grateful to OVSJG for the continued support of the Task Force's work, which has the capacity to transform the District's criminal justice system for many years to come. To ensure adequate support of a critical part of OVSJG's work and that these community-driven, consensus-based Task Force recommendations are implemented, we strongly urge the Council to act on our suggestions above. Together, these requests are only a small portion of the overall budget, but they could change the lives of thousands of incarcerated people and returning citizens in the District who are among D.C.'s most impacted by the ongoing pandemic. That concludes my testimony, thank you for your time and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.