



COUNCIL FOR COURT EXCELLENCE

**Statement
of the Council for Court Excellence
before the
Committee on Housing and Workforce Development
Council of the District of Columbia**

**Agency Performance Oversight Hearing
on the
Office of Ex-Offender Affairs**

**March 19, 2009
4:00 pm**

Good morning, Chairman Barry and members of the committee. My name is June Kress. I am Executive Director of the Council for Court Excellence (“CCE”), which is a local nonpartisan civic organization founded in 1982 to improve the administration of justice in the courts and related justice agencies in the District of Columbia. As is our practice, no judicial member of CCE participated in the formulation of this testimony, which concerns the performance of the DC Office of Ex-Offender Affairs.

For 27 years, CCE has been a unique resource that brings together members of the civic, legal, business, and judicial communities to work in common purpose to identify and promote court reforms, improve public access to justice, and increase public understanding and support of our justice system.

CCE has worked closely with the DC Council on many issues, including the 1994 Probate Reform Act, the Office of Administrative Hearings Establishment Act of 2001 and subsequent amendments, as well as on a number of sentencing related matters. In June 2005, we testified before the Judiciary Committee in joint hearings with the Committee on Health regarding persons with mental health diagnoses in the DC Jail and Correctional Treatment Facility. Most recently, CCE has provided the Judiciary Committee public statements on Bill 17-



841, the Eyewitness Identification Procedures Act of 2008, and Bill 17-431, the Juvenile Speedy Trial Equity Amendment Act of 2008.

In the past four years we have worked constructively with the DC Council on matters relating to the issue of ex-offender reentry. In 2006 the CCE Expungement Subcommittee proposed legislation that was largely adopted by the DC Council as the Criminal Record Sealing Act of 2006, Bill 16-746. More recently, CCE provided testimony to the Public Safety and Judiciary Committee on Bill 17-750, the Parole Credit Maintenance Amendment Act of 2008.

The Council for Court Excellence would like to express its support for the work of the DC Office of Ex-Offender Affairs during a period when, in its first full year of activity, it experienced the departure of its founding Executive Director and the beginnings of what we now know to be a national economic crisis. We urge the Mayor promptly to appoint an Executive Director and the DC Council to hold confirmation hearings as soon as possible to ensure permanent leadership for this Cabinet-level position.

In July 2008, The Washington Post reported the unemployment rate of D.C. ex-offenders at 50%, compared to the overall D.C. unemployment rate of 6.7%. By December 2008, the overall D.C. unemployment rate increased by one-third to 8.8%. While the current unemployment rate for D.C. ex-offenders is unknown, it is likely to have increased, perhaps significantly. What is clear is that ex-offenders and the families they support are among those most likely to experience serious difficulty, regardless of the economic situation.

While the difficulties faced by ex-offenders range from addiction, housing, mental and physical health, disenfranchisement, among others, it is well-established that positive correlations exist between meaningful employment and reductions in recidivism and parole



violations: Of those who violate parole or probation, roughly 75% are unemployed at the time of the offense.

The Council for Court Excellence's D.C. Prisoner Reentry Initiative is working to address the systemic and legal barriers to employment for D.C. ex-offenders with a felony conviction, at the suggestion of several stakeholder agencies, including the Office of Ex-Offender Affairs, the DC Public Defender Service and the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency. The Initiative is planning to engage the perspectives of D.C. private and public employers and ex-offenders; gather data and policy practices from key correctional agencies, such as the Federal Bureau of Prisons, Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency, and the U.S. Parole Commission; and conduct legal research on federal and local statutory and regulatory prohibitions and incentives on hiring ex-offenders with a felony conviction.

The Initiative is comprised of members of the CCE Board of Directors, as well as representatives of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, the U.S. Parole Commission, Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency, U.S. Attorney's Office for D.C., D.C. Public Defender Service, D.C. Superior Court, D.C. Office of Ex-Offender Affairs, D.C. Criminal Code and Sentencing Commission, Alliance of Concerned Men, Visitors' Services Center, D.C. Chamber of Commerce, and the D.C. Prisoners' Project of the Washington Lawyers' Committee.

This concludes the testimony of the Council for Court Excellence. I would be happy to address any questions that you may have.