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**Statement of the Council for Court Excellence
Before the Committee on Government Operations
of the Council of the District of Columbia**

**Hearing on B24-0865, the Commission on Re-Entry Services
for Women Amendment Act of 2022**

Thursday, October 13, 2022

Good morning Chairman White and members of the Committee. My name is Olinda Moyd, and I am here in my capacity as a Board leader for the Council for Court Excellence (CCE) and Co-Chair of CCE's Criminal Justice Committee to testify in support of the "Commission on Re-Entry Services for Women Amendment Act of 2022." I am joined today by Casey Anderson, CCE's Policy & Communications Manager. 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, convening diverse stakeholders, and creating educational resources for the public. Please note that in accordance with our policy, no judicial member of CCE participated in the formulation or approval of this testimony. This testimony does not reflect the specific views of, or endorsement by, any judicial member of CCE.

Almost a decade ago CCE published [*Beyond Second Chances*](#), a comprehensive report on reentry in the District. In that report, CCE wrote:

"D.C. does not have enough high-quality, re-entry-specific programming,

and the gaps are greatest for programs designed to accommodate the needs of special populations, including women, youth and members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (and/or questioning) (LGBTQ) community.”

Formerly incarcerated women, community advocates, and organizations such as CCE have been highlighting the need for parity in programming, support, and resources for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women for decades. Unfortunately, the District has taken little action in response. We are cautiously optimistic that the District will finally take this first step by forming the Commission on Re-Entry Services for Women and enhance services and resources for justice involved women.

Women often enter the criminal legal system under different circumstances than men, with histories of abuse, mental illness tied to early life experiences, substance use disorders, economic and social marginality, homelessness or dysfunctional relationships. The “Commission on Re-Entry Services for Women Amendment Act of 2022” has the opportunity to create a space that centers the voices of formerly incarcerated women and hears, uplifts, and addresses the programs, assistance, and resources they need as they return to the D.C. community from incarceration.

Though the overall number of women incarcerated in Department of Corrections (DOC) facilities has decreased slightly during the pandemic, the overall percentage of women in DOC custody has increased. On October 1, 2020, women comprised 3.8% of the DOC population, however by July 2022, women were 5.69% of the DOC’s population, a roughly 50% increase.¹ However, unfortunately, DOC’s annually-released Facts and Figures, which provides insights into the demographics of those incarcerated in DOC facilities, does not consistently break figures

¹ Please see [Department of Corrections Facts and Figures October 2020](#) page 7 and [Department of Corrections Facts and Figures July 2022](#) page 17.

down by sex, making it all but impossible to understand the current circumstances of justice-involved women. Inconsistent data collection makes it difficult to track incarceration and reentry trends with women in the District. This issue is compounded for women convicted of D.C. Code offenses housed in the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Without knowing how great the need is, how can we accurately allot resources to ensure all women returning home from incarceration are met with the community, programming, and assistance needed to thrive? By passing and enacting the “Commission on Re-Entry Services for Women Amendment Act of 2022,” the District is committing to uplifting the voices of formerly incarcerated women – particularly formerly incarcerated Black women who are overrepresented in D.C.’s criminal legal system.

DOC’s July 2022 Facts and Figures state that roughly 60% of all women incarcerated at DOC facilities were unemployed at the time of their incarceration. A separate study that followed individuals from their teenage years into early adulthood showed that women who had served six months or more in an adult institution had accumulated, during the 10 years of the study, less than half the work experience of those who had not served time.² Gender bias that already exist in the workforce is magnified for women who have served time, further limiting opportunities to establish a solid and successful career.

The Commission on Re-Entry Services for Women has the opportunity to increase the work experience and the quality of life of returning women by examining workforce development and educational opportunities tailored to returning women. However, examination is not the same as action. This Commission must also take swift action, with financial support from the District, to implement these workforce development and educational programs, establishing gender-responsive and evidence-based practices in correctional facilities and with

² Council for Court Excellence. *Beyond Second Chances: Returning Citizens’ Re-Entry Struggles and Successes in the District of Columbia*. December 2016. <https://www.courtexcellence.org/uploads/File/BSC-FINAL-web.pdf>

community-based providers. Supporting services must address the physical, emotional, and psychological challenges justice-involved women face prior to, during, and after incarceration.

CCE urges the Committee to consider several additions to the legislation. First, regarding the individuals slated to be on the commission in Section 1303(b)(1), we believe it would be beneficial for the representative described in subsection (b)(1)(E) to also have experience in non-traditional job assignments for women in various industries. Second, Section 1303(b)(2), which references a non-voting member representative from the University of the District of Columbia should be amended to specify a department or indicate the representative be designated by the University President. Lastly, in reference to the CRSW's directive described in Section 1303(c)(1)(D) to provide policy recommendations on issues affecting women who are returning citizens to the Office of Returning Citizens Affairs, the policy recommendations should also be made to:

- a). Department of Corrections to provide gender responsive and trauma informed responses to the needs of women;
- b). All criminal justice partners to use gender responsive assessment tools;
- c). Assess women's healthcare needs while in custody and connect with community-based resources upon release;
- d). Build a network of community partners to facilitate a seamless transition and reentry process.

We urge the Committee to incorporate these recommendations.

I would like to end this testimony with a personal anecdote. My mother was incarcerated multiple times throughout my childhood and young adulthood. While she was incarcerated in Virginia, many of the barriers women face when returning to their communities are similar across regions, though compounded by other demographics, such as their race, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status. Earlier in CCE's testimony, Olinda highlighted how women

enter the criminal legal system often under different circumstances than men and my mother was no exception, having dealt with childhood abuse and an active substance use disorder. Her incarceration did not aid in her sobriety nor help her process her childhood trauma. Upon her release, she continued to struggle without the proper resources and support. I remember talking with her about a job interview several years ago and her telling me that as soon as they ran the background check, she knew she wouldn't get the position, despite the interview going well and being qualified for the role. I often wonder if she would still be alive, here with us today if upon her reentry, she had been connected to a care team that understood the unique circumstances and needs of incarcerated women. With the proper investments and action, the "Commission on Re-Entry Services for Women Amendment Act of 2022" has the opportunity to change the lives of D.C.'s formerly incarcerated women, and in turn the lives of their loved ones.

CCE's mission is to enhance the justice system in the District of Columbia to serve the public equitably. Ensuring that formerly incarcerated women receive the same level of care, support, and resources as their male counterparts is just one part of creating such a system. By establishing the Commission on Re-Entry Services for Women, the District takes one step closer to providing parity in services, supports, and resources for returning citizen women. This concludes my testimony. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.