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

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

**February 6, 2019**

Good morning, Chairman Allen and members of the committee. My name is

Casey Anderson and I work as a policy analyst and development manager for the Council for Court Excellence (CCE). Over the past 37 years CCE, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization, has worked to improve the administration of justice in the courts and related agencies in DC. Per our policy, no judicial member of CCE participated in the preparation of today's testimony.

Today, we will testify about the invaluable role the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants (OVSJG) plays in the District. We will also provide an update on the two current CCE projects funded by OVSJG – Reentry Action Network Administration and Technical Assistance and the DC Correctional Facility Community Engagement – and the ways in which these initiatives are helping to build better justice in DC.

**Collaboration between OVSJG and CCE**

OVSJG has been an invaluable partner to CCE in our shared work to create a more equitable justice system in DC. Under director Michelle Garcia's capable

leadership, OVSJG does far more than simply serve as a funder and grant administrator. OVSJG provides vital educational and capacity-building support to grantees, establishes priorities for collective effort, brings stakeholders together for dialogue, and finds innovative ways to continuously improve the work they support.

For instance, in 2017, OVSJG funded an updated edition of CCE's Victim's Guide to the District of Columbia Justice System, which we have been publishing for more than 30 years. Then, in 2018, OVSJG identified additional funding to translate and print the victim's guide in Spanish and Amharic for the very first time. This reflects OVSJG's commitment to serving all residents of the District, increasing our ability to reach non-English speakers and share important information about their rights if they are ever a victim of a crime. From what we observe, this type of creative thinking and support is offered to government agencies and non-profits throughout DC.

### **Reentry Action Network**

OVSJG has been a crucial contributor to our administration of the DC Reentry Action Network (RAN) and provision of technical assistance to its members since shortly after its formation in 2017. RAN is a coalition of nonprofit organizations that provide direct reentry services to justice-involved DC residents with the goal of promoting successful reintegration. The coalition provides an ongoing opportunity for its members to exchange information, address issues of mutual concern, discuss obstacles faced by their clients, strengthen services, and speak with a collective voice as advocates. CCE administers RAN by scheduling meetings and crafting agendas, facilitating strategic planning sessions, and helping RAN pursue its priorities by

securing training opportunities, developing a communication strategy, and drafting educational materials for RAN members.

RAN's work is particularly critical in the District. One in 22 adults are under correctional control on any given day,<sup>1</sup> and it can be prohibitively difficult to navigate the system of resources available. Upon reentry, returning citizens face enormous challenges including a severe lack of affordable housing,<sup>2</sup> entry-level employment opportunities,<sup>3</sup> and specific reentry programs tailored for special populations (e.g. women, youth, the LGBTQ community, etc.), as well as diminished access to mental and physical healthcare<sup>4</sup> and myriad other issues. Through RAN, reentry service providers collaborate to cultivate both long and short-term solutions to these issues and tailor their services to better support returning citizens in this challenging environment.

OVSJG contributes essential support to this network by providing the funding needed for CCE to effectively facilitate RAN. Now that the coalition has established its governance structure, elected its new Leadership Council, and set policy priorities, RAN is poised to tackle many of its goals in FY19. To that end, with OVSJG's support, CCE is facilitating two important trainings this year.

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<sup>1</sup> US Census data shows that out of approximately 504,242 adults in the District of Columbia in 2015, roughly 22,999 people were under correctional control on a given day (excluding average daily arrests).

<sup>2</sup> Elkins, K. (2016). The 11 most expensive cities in America. *Business Insider*.

<sup>3</sup> Rothwell, J. (2012). *Education, job opening, and unemployment in metropolitan America*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution.

<sup>4</sup> Council for Court Excellence. (2016). *Beyond Second Chances*.

The first is a comprehensive communications training for RAN member organizations and their returning citizen clients to learn to speak with government decision makers and the media in a policy-oriented way. This training is designed by CCE and specially tailored to RAN's needs. The second is a Train-the-Trainer event sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). With CCE's assistance, RAN won a competitive grant to provide training to member organization staff, plus staff from CSOSA and the DC Courts, in creating a trauma-informed justice system. These opportunities wouldn't have been possible without OVSGJ's support of CCE's administration of RAN and its support of individual member organizations.

### **DC Correctional Facility Community Engagement**

There is widespread agreement that DC's Central Detention Facility, which opened 43 years ago, must be closed. Beyond the facility's physical needs, CCE believes that planning for the future must include a broader consideration of how a jail should be used and the appropriate scale for our community. This requires an understanding of the public health and public safety needs of the District, and a holistic focus on how a new facility fits into the city leaders' and residents' priorities to make our community safer and healthier for all.

CCE received FY2019 funding from OVSJG to focus on articulating the best practices and our community's vision for a new correctional facility. The process will include meaningful community engagement, analysis of how we currently incarcerate people in the District and who we are incarcerating, research on best practices in promoting rehabilitation in jails, implementable models of alternatives to incarceration, and the creation of a commission of

community stakeholders to provide oversight and guidance for the project. CCE, along with its partners the Vera Institute of Justice and the National Reentry Network for Returning Citizens, will seek input from currently and formerly incarcerated people and their families, people who currently work in the DC Jail, members from the neighborhoods surrounding potential locations, government agencies, organizations that work with currently and formerly incarcerated citizens, and DC-area residents who are all affected on a broader level. Since the project just began in January 2019, it is still in the beginning stages. However, we know that this work is vitally needed and that the support received from OVSJG will create lasting and necessary change in our community.

### **Conclusion**

CCE would like to extend our gratitude to OVSJG for their continued support and partnership in tackling these difficult issues. The team at OVSJG is easy to work with, responsive, and clearly passionate about their mission. The work that has resulted from their funding is crucial and effective, and we greatly value their guidance in how we can continue to create a more equitable and just system. This concludes our testimony, and we welcome any questions you may have.