

Summary of Phase II Community Meetings
District Task Force on Jails and Justice
Prepared by the National Reentry Network for Returning Citizens
September 2020

The National Reentry Network for Returning Citizens hosted four virtual community meetings during the month of September. We designed these sessions to provide information to the public on the Phase II work of the Task Force. Our intent was also to address important changes and events that have occurred in the city since the Phase I report was published, with particular attention to the effects of COVID-19. Sessions were designed to provide an opportunity for participants to ask questions and share their opinions and experiences directly with Task Force members. Both of these goals—information sharing and access to decision makers—reflect feedback from Phase I community engagement. Another goal of these events was to allow Task Force committees to seek specific feedback from the community.

Community members continue to show deep interest in the outcomes of the Task Force work. The format was well suited to delivering a presentation and taking questions. Our use of virtual meeting technology made the events more accessible for some, but unfortunately made it much more difficult to participate for those with limited technological capability.

We were pleased to welcome about 50 total participants. We noted that registration for these events outpaced attendance by two-to-one which helps us prepare for future meetings. The National Reentry Network recommends the Task Force consider releasing of a recorded version of the presentation for email distribution or posting online to reach those unable to attend.

During the meetings, participants asked questions that demonstrate the variety of ways that their lives intersect with these issues and the importance of these events for sharing information. Many questions concerned current policies and operations in the city and in detention facilities in particular. Other questions and comments spoke more generally to the challenges and specifics of the issues at hand, such as:

How can DC assist those released under COVID measures to make sure they are supported for success?

How can we expect any meaningful change while white supremacy still exists?

Money for a new jail is an investment in failure.

How do we account for the increase in public health needs that will accompany decarceration and reentry? What is working there?

What is being done to address issues with parole over the next two years before DC regains control?

What can be done to make sure supervision is not serving as a replacement for incarceration?

Participants referenced and inquired about solutions being explored in other jurisdictions. They also submitted a number of ideas for consideration by the Task Force, including:

Issuance of bonds to fund community investments as a Marshall Plan for Black communities.

Removal of old detainers to make more people eligible for compassionate release, home confinement, and programming.

Recruitment of crisis responders to serve the neighborhoods in which they live or were raised.

Creation of opportunities for justice-involved individuals to give back to their community in the arena of public safety.

Participants expressed appreciation for our efforts to share information. At the conclusion of the meetings, they were offered a take-home worksheet to prompt reflection and examine how they situate themselves within this work. The reflection worksheet was intended to account for the less personal nature of meeting online amidst the tragedies unfolding in our country and our community. It should be noted that the meetings served as a platform for new connections among participants and staff. Our engagement with community stakeholders continues to provide mutual benefit to the Task Force and participants.