

Written Testimony Submitted to the
Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security
U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary
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REAUTHORIZATION OF THE SECOND CHANCE ACT

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Testimony

Mr. Chairmen and Committee Members:

Good Afternoon,

My name is Gladyse Taylor and I am the Acting Director of the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC). Thank you for the honor of appearing before you today.

Today I am here in support for the reauthorization of the Second Chance Act. The Second Chance Act provides crucial resources at a time when states are experiencing extreme fiscal crisis. In Illinois, one out of every \$20 dollars of the general revenue fund is spent on corrections. The Illinois Department of Corrections has an annual budget of approximately one billion dollars per year. However, the amount of funding spent on services for people to effectively reintegrate into their communities is only a small portion in comparison. Critical services (such as housing, mental health, substance abuse, and vocational programs) continue to lose funding and people are left with little to no options for receiving assistance to improve their lives. Funding from Second Chance allows governments and communities to coordinate reentry efforts, enhance existing housing and support services, engage in evidence-based practices and create innovative strategies that will serve the growing needs of this population, ultimately increasing public safety and reducing recidivism.

I am excited to share with you how the Illinois Department of Corrections will utilize its Second Chance Act funding and the benefits that Second Chance dollars will bring to Illinois to improve outcomes for offenders returning to communities. Illinois was awarded over \$3.6 million dollars to engage in various strategies that improve reentry programming at the institutional level and at the local level through the demonstration grants, mentoring grants, as well as several other solicitations under the Second Chance Act and the Bureau of Justice Administration.

- This funding will support reentry services for juveniles to receive evidence-based, family-focused aftercare as they transition from the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice to their home communities.

- It will support services for offenders coming out of Cook County Jail by initiating new pre-release programs that improve pre-release planning, coordination, and access to community-based services and programs for roughly 300 participants in targeted high-impact Chicago communities.
- Cook County Juvenile Probation will engage in a joint effort with the City of Chicago Police Department and the Department of Family and Support Services to increase outcomes for youth with co-occurring substance abuse and mental health disorders. Funding will be used to address the complex issues associated with youth that need a variety of wrap-around services for drug dependency and mental health issues.
- IDOC was awarded a Second Chance grant under the Family-Based Prisoner Substance Abuse Treatment Program solicitation. The Department is using this award to expand our innovative *Moms & Babies Program* to include critical case management and family reunification services.

An estimated 80 percent of the Illinois' adult female prison population is single mothers. At the time of incarceration the majority of these women are the primary caretakers of their children. While the mother is incarcerated, many children are raised by family members or placed in foster care. The *Moms & Babies Program*, implemented at the Decatur Women's Correctional Facility in Illinois three years ago, provides the opportunity for mothers to care for their children, develop stronger family ties, have fewer disciplinary problems and increase the pro-social development for the babies. The program allows qualified mothers to keep their newborn babies with them in prison for up to 24 months.

IDOC's current *Moms & Babies Program* does not have a strong or even formalized community reentry or transition component. Case management and other reentry services have been provided in-kind by service providers. However, with the state's budget crisis, many of the service providers who supported mothers with their reentry needs are no longer in business or cannot afford to provide in-kind assistance.

During the three years that the IDOC *Moms & Babies Program* has operated, there had been a zero recidivism rate among the 25 participants who completed the program. In the past year, IDOC program administrators have seen an increase in the number of former program participants in the community contacting the Mom & Babies Program counselors to seek help and advice. Recently, one of the participants was returned to IDOC custody on a suspected parole violation for THC and prescription drug

use, which unfortunately, resulted in her son being taken away. While direct substance abuse counseling and education are currently available on-site, participants in this program have a high vulnerability for relapse upon completion of treatment because they lack the knowledge of or access to the resources needed for smooth and quick transitions into effective, supportive services.

IDOC's Second Chance award will be used to provide these women with the necessary reentry case management and family reunification services needed to produce positive outcomes for them and their families. Ensuring that the proper supports are in place to prevent recidivism and that mothers are parenting their children, receiving services, and improving their lives will increase their chances for future success.

Though these are just some of Illinois' Second Chance Act initiatives, the message remains the same for all:

- These awards ultimately improve service delivery outcomes for our offender populations, both juveniles and adults.
- Without Second Chance Act funding, our state's ability to increase services would be difficult.

I implore to you, Chairmen and Committee members, to please reauthorize the Second Chance Act. Continued investment in providing second chances for people with criminal backgrounds is an investment in safe and successful reintegration and will keep this country moving towards stronger families and communities.

I would like to thank Chairman Conyers and the rest of the Committee for allowing me to testify on this critical issue.