

**Testimony of
Louis Sawyer Jr
Co-Chairperson of the DC Reentry Task Force and a
Commissioner - DC Commission on Reentry and Returning Citizens Affairs
For a Public Meeting of the
Charles Colson Task Force on Federal Corrections
Wednesday, March 11, 2015**

Good Morning Chair Watts, Vice Chair Mollohan, and distinguished members of the Task Force, thank you for providing me with this opportunity to speak with you on today. By way of introduction, I am Louis Sawyer Jr, a survivor of the Criminal Justice/Mental Health system(s) respectively within the District of Columbia. I am also co-chairperson of the District of Columbia's Reentry Task Force, a nongovernmental community advocacy group which believes that improving the community corrections system is critical both to returning citizens and to the health of the wider community. My assignment is to inform you of our, the DC Reentry Task Force's concerns regarding District residents housed in Federal Bureau of Prisons Facilities.

The District of Columbia is unique in that those criminal justice functions that in other jurisdictions would be run by the state, here they are run by the federal government. In other places, people convicted of breaking federal laws go to FBOP facilities. Here, people convicted of local offenses – over 5,000 at most recent counts -- are sent to federal prisons as well. They are sent to halfway houses that the FBOP contracts with, and are supervised in the community by a federal agency, the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency, known as CSOSA.

The community of the District of Columbia has no control over what happens to our residents convicted of local offenses. We do not have a say in which prison they go to, one within a half day's drive or one clear across the continent. We have no control over what happens to them – whether they receive educational, vocational or mental health services - whether they are put in solitary confinement or administrative segregation. We cannot decide whether to use private, for profit prisons. The halfway houses that they return to are managed by private companies that have no accountability to the advocacy community within the District of Columbia, or the DC Government for that matter.

In many ways, it's as though the Federal government is the guardian over our incarcerated citizens. But unlike a true guardianship, there is no real oversight of the guardian. The DC Correctional Information Council, or CIC, which is a DC governmental mandated body, has been given authority to visit federal facilities and write reports about what they find. But they are not monitors – facilities are not instructed to address problems that the CIC identifies. They cannot demand improved reentry services planning, reduced use of isolation, nor placement closer to home. We are not provided by the FBOP any reports beyond what prisons our love ones are incarcerated in.

With the 1997 Revitalization Act approaching its 20th anniversary, it's time to examine whether the federal government is living up to its past agreements, as well as to have a serious conversation about what the relationship should be moving forward between the FBOP and the DC community, for as long as the FBOP acts in effect as our correctional agency.

First, among issues needing to be addressed is keeping DC residents close to home. Evidence has shown that being able to stay connected to love ones, family members and the community-at-large is key to successful reentry. Visits from families, ability of community organizations to provide wrap-around support services and connect our love ones who are incarcerated with housing, employment and other basic needs are critical to the transition back to the community. Right now, these are all but impossible for DC residents housed in the FBOP.

Included with this testimony is a map and table showing where DC residents are incarcerated in FBOP facilities. The circle indicates the 500 mile radius that the FBOP said it would try to keep DC residents within. Over a thousand DC residents are incarcerated beyond this circle, many as far away as California and Arizona.

Of course, even a 500 mile radius makes it very difficult for many DC residents to visit their incarcerated love ones and family members. Driving roundtrip to Connecticut or Kentucky would be almost impossible to do in a single day, meaning travel and lodging costs which most cannot afford. As you are aware, involving family and community groups in pre-release programming is also impacted by distance.

The DC Reentry Task Force asks the Colson Task Force to recommend that the FBOP keep ALL DC code offenders within 500 miles, unless an individual has risks or needs that cannot be managed in any facility within that radius, as is documented in writing; that those under age 25 be kept within a 250 mile radius; and that free video visitation and low-cost regular transportation be made available for all facilities housing DC residents.

Next is the issue of halfway houses, which by definition are part of the community corrections system. Currently, DC code offenders in FBOP facilities return to Hope Village, a 360 bed **for-profit** halfway house that contracts with the FBOP. A May 2013 DC Correctional Information Council CIC report; <http://cic.dc.gov/publication/cic-hope-village-report-may-24-2013> documented the lack of programming, the adverse environment, and the denial of access to mental health services. Many community groups wishing to provide services are locked out, even though a halfway house is labeled as community corrections. Even CSOSA, the federal adult supervision agency, after being asked to leave cannot return to provide reentry services.

On Friday, February 20, 2015, I and members of the DC Reentry Task Force, met with the FBOP Assistant Director for Reentry and her team. We were told that the Statement of Work for the next contract will be changed. This sounds like an improvement, although it doesn't do any good for the hundreds of men who will pass through Hope Village before their contract(s) expire in 2016 and 2017. However, we here in the District of Columbia were not consulted in regards to this Statement of Work. There was no recognition that we, the DC community, have any right to expect to be a part of the process whereby services for our citizens who broke local laws and will return to the community are determined.

The DC Reentry Task Force asks the Colson Task Force to recommend that the FBOP first address the CIC report on Hope Village that was done in May 2013, responding to the deficiencies and providing a plan, with a timeline, for remediation of these deficiencies. Second, we ask that the FBOP hold a public hearing/meeting here in DC regarding the new proposed Statement of Work for halfway houses i.e., community corrections centers, PRIOR to implementation. We of course would expect the FBOP to take the community's recommendations into account. For example, if the FBOP budget doesn't provide for sufficient educational or vocational programming, we would like the opportunity to propose a requirement that the halfway house i.e., community corrections centers, allow DC to provide these services with its own funding and relationships with nonprofit organizations.

Finally, we ask that the Colson Task Force recommend that the FBOP develop a partnership with the District of Columbia community whereby the District has a meaningful role in the way its citizens are treated while incarcerated. This would include more and more robust public reporting on the conditions of prisons our residents are housed in. On what type of programming and services we should be able to expect at each facility. On where our residents are placed, and how many are in supermax or in solitary confinement. Whether special education needs of our young residents are being met. And what type of services and supervision they receive when they return to the District. We would be happy to meet with you and others to discuss further what such a partnership might entail.

We recognize that only 3.3 percent of U.S. citizens incarcerated in the Federal Bureau of Prisons facilities are DC Code offenders. However, 100 percent of people in prison from DC are housed in FBOP facilities. Our jurisdiction is the most impacted on a per capita basis by the policies and practices of the FBOP.

Thank you for allowing me to share this testimony today.

States where DC code Offenders are being held in BOP controlled facilities (excludes those in transit)	State Total
OR	5
TN	5
KS	7
OH	9
AR	10
CT	10
MS	13
AL	16
MN	22
IL	23
OK	27
MO	31
NH	31
MA	32
CO	56
GA	56
IN	60
NY	77
LA	84
TX	93
AZ	108
CA	151
FL	185
MD	202
SC	229
NJ	245
DC	318
KY	327
VA	349
NC	611
PA	792
WV	886
TOTAL	5,332

