

Chuck Colson Task Force Testimony

(1) The status of current BOP current risk and needs assessment practices, substance abuse treatment and rehabilitation, and employment programs and opportunities for improvement.

(2) The impact of current federal prosecution, sentencing, release and supervision policies and practices, and suggestions for reform

Criminal Justice Reform Policy has emerged as a rare bipartisan effort in favor of reforming US drug sentencing laws. There are several organizations (Right On Crime, The Sentencing Project, Families Against Mandatory Minimums) that may be credited with relentless work on this issue and bringing it to the forefront. As a result of these efforts and work, it is likely that many non-violent and juvenile returning citizens will rejoin communities across the country. This fact has significant implications for the role of community supervision officers and BOP Residential Reentry Managers and Centers. Thus substance abuse treatment, rehabilitation and employment programs must be assessed accordingly. These factors are inherently associated with supervision policies and practices. Perhaps the most compelling and insistent factor will be navigating the employment path for returning citizens. Policy makers must assess and monitor the impact of the returning citizens' job market preparedness on recidivism and employment outcomes.

More than 2 million adults are incarcerated in United States prison systems, each year greater than 700,000 citizens return to communities without training or viable skills that allow them to obtain employment (Davis, et. al, 2014). The result is an increased rate of recidivism in the United States, particularly in metropolitan areas such as Washington, DC where the education

and employment skill set (multiple degrees from eminent universities, certifications, credentialing and licensing) is above average compared thus creating an extremely competitive employment market. In 2013, Virginia residents had a median household income of \$62,666, and 36.1% of the residents having earned a Bachelor's degree or higher. Maryland residents had a median household income of \$72,483, and 37.4% of the residents having earned a Bachelor's Degree or higher (Wall Street 24/7, September 2014). The 2011 Census Bureau American Community Survey reports that Washington, DC residents have a median household income of \$86,880; and 47.3% of its residents above age 25 have earned a Bachelor's Degree or higher (CRA Census series 2011). This raises the employment standard remarkably high for a returning citizen who likely does not possess this education level or skill set.

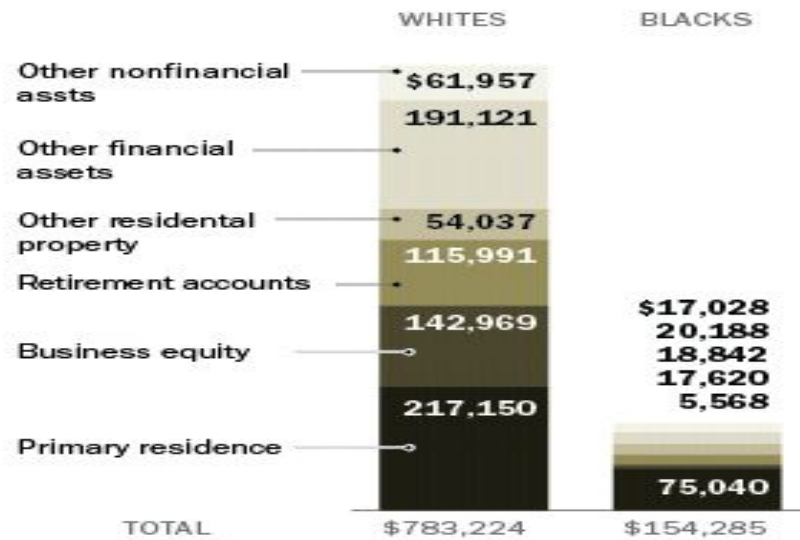
Since the 1960's, household-income growth for African-Americans has outpaced that of Caucasians. Median adjusted household income for African-Americans is 59.2% that of whites, up slightly from 55.3% in 1967. But these gains haven't led to narrowing the wealth gap. After adjusting for inflation, the median net income for African American households in 2011 was \$6446, down from \$7150 in 1984 (Pew Research Center, August 2013).

The stability in household wealth follows a dramatic drop during the Great Recession. From 2007 to 2010, the median net worth of American families decreased by 39.4%, from \$135,700 to \$82,300. The median wealth of non-Hispanic black households fell 33.7%, from \$16,600 in 2010 to \$11,000 in 2013. Among Hispanics, median wealth decreased by 14.3%, from \$16,000 to \$13,700. For all families white, black and Hispanic median wealth is still less than its pre-recession level (Pew Research Center, 2014). Both charts indicate little to no generational wealth,

and likely very little savings to support returning citizens particularly in the Hispanic and African American communities.

Average U.S. Household Assets, 2010

In 2011 dollars

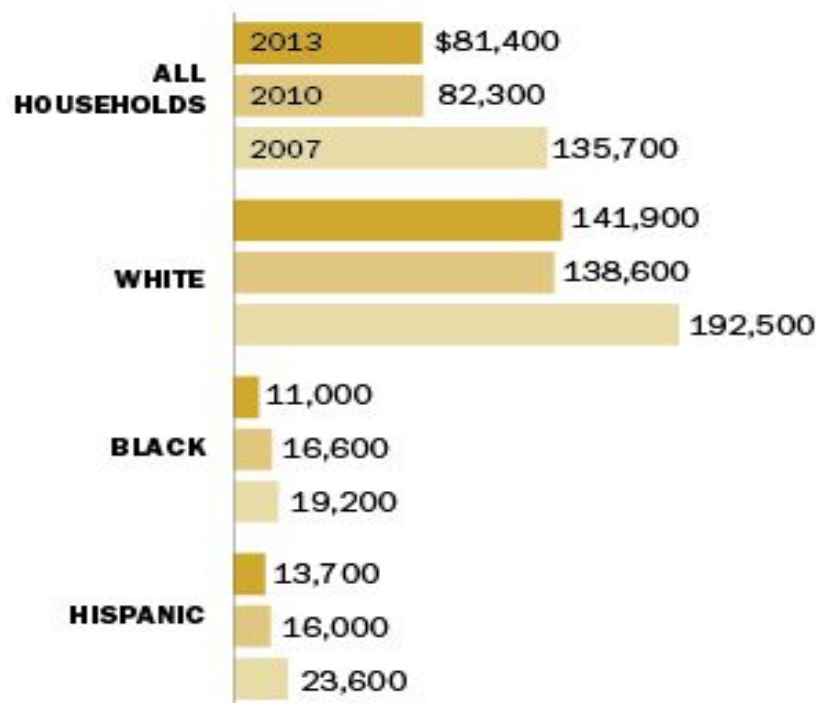


Source: Pew Research Center analysis of Federal Reserve's "Survey of Consumer Finances" data

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Wealth by Race and Ethnicity, 2007-13

Median net worth of households, in 2013 dollars



Note: Blacks and whites include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race.

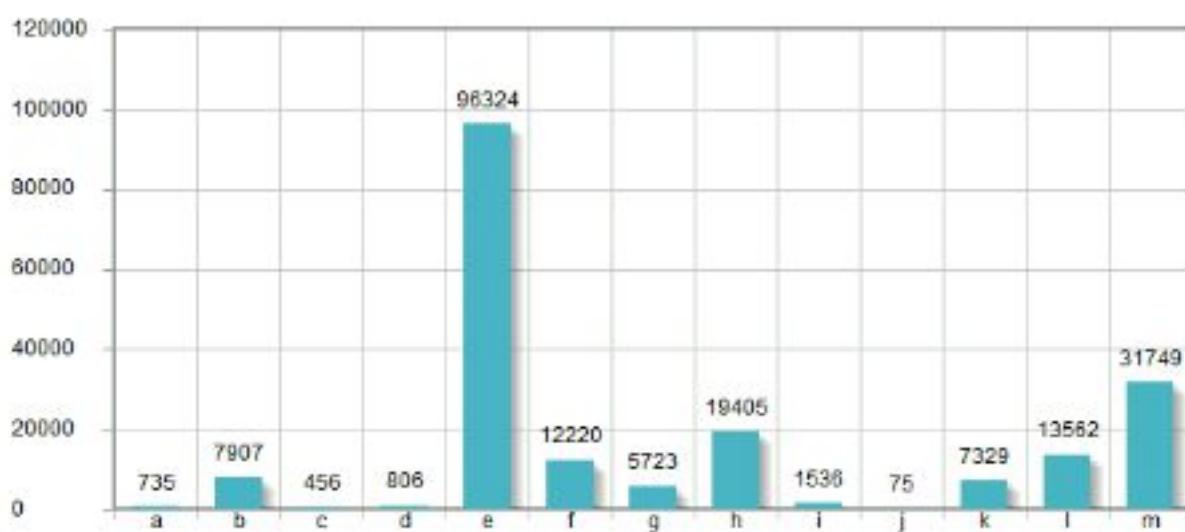
Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of Survey of Consumer Finances public-use data

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There is a significant correlation between inmate age, offenses and sentences imposed in the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Nearly 50% of this population was charged with drug offenses, serving 5 to 15 year sentences imposed, and the greatest population age range was between 26 and 46 years old (Federal Bureau of Prisons, January 24, 2015). These are productive working years that inmates are unable to earn income to support family; but more importantly it disallows them to maintain pace with society's rapid information technological advancement. Given the growing role of information technology in society, policymakers need to determine how to effectively leverage such technology for correctional education (Davis, et al. 2014). These factors also have a profound effect on the returning citizens' mental health transition back into the community.

Offenses

Statistics based on prior month's data -- Last Updated: Saturday, 24 January 2015
Please Note: Data is limited due to the availability of offense-specific information.



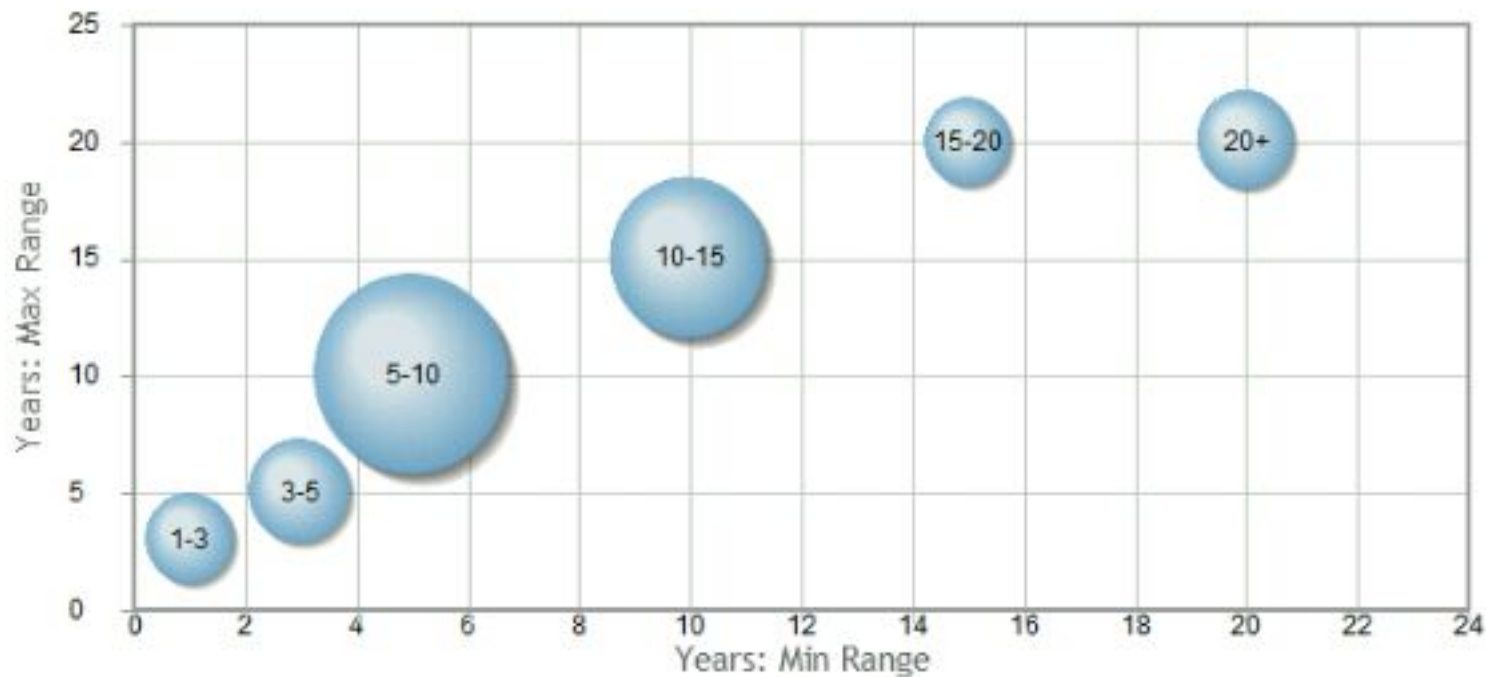
Inmate Age

Statistics based on prior month's data -- Last Updated: Saturday, 24 January 2015
Please Note: Data is limited due to the availability of offense-specific information.



Sentences Imposed

Statistics based on prior month's data -- Last Updated: Saturday, 24 January 2015
Please Note: Data is limited by availability of sentencing information.



There are several obstacles that incarcerated adults must face upon their release from prison, including the prospect of unemployment. A lower level of educational attainment, an absence of a steady history of employment, and a lack of usable vocational skills can hinder efforts to find a job and make a decent wage. (Davis et al. 2014). Although various federal community

readiness assessment tools are completed (BP-388 and ISD assessment) prior to home confinement and residential re-entry placements; access that addresses the employment and financial needs of this population should be in tandem with substance abuse, mental health and medical treatment. Another obstacle to former inmates' economic viability is the money many owe for court or supervision fees, victim restitution or child support. These financial obligations are important mechanisms to repay debts, support children and hold offenders accountable, and former inmates should be required and given incentives to pay them. However, efforts to enforce these obligations can also be self-defeating (Western, B., and Pettit, B, 2010). A third obstacle encountered by returning citizens employment discrimination despite the "ban the box" legislation. Although there are Federally-established employment discrimination protections for returning citizens and their criminal records; the returning citizens often experience required background checks that are unfavorable even when they do not apply for jobs where "vulnerable" populations are involved. These citizens have the option of pursuing legal recourse with the state's Attorney General, but often they do not.

Vocational education can be offered in various trade industries, including barbering, building maintenance, carpentry, electrical trades, painting, plumbing, food service/culinary arts, horticulture, custodial maintenance, upholstery, auto detailing, masonry, welding, and heating, ventilation, and air conditioning. The type of vocational training available in a prison will depend on inmates' interests, availability of teaching staff, and funding (National Institute of Justice). Unfortunately, the availability of comprehensive education and workforce training programs are rare, and those that do exist have low participation rates; only about 10 percent of all inmates attend educational, vocational or treatment programs on a given day. Policy makers therefore might consider expanding and bringing to scale proven education and job training

programs that combine job search and placement support with services that address former inmates' specific barriers to employment, such as low skills or substance abuse (Western, B., Pettit, B., 2010).

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT AND SUGGESTIONS FOR REFORM

- Ø Access that addresses the employment and/or financial needs of this population should be in tandem with substance abuse, mental health and medical treatment. Financial concerns impact substance abuse and the ability to maintain psych medication regimen and treatment.
- Ø Update BP-833 and ISD Plans (BOP assessments)
- Ø Further investigation as to why the vocational and education participation rate is low, these programs should be reassessed and reevaluated in terms of voluntary versus mandatory education and career training programs in prisons
- Ø Further investigation as to why there is a lack of availability of comprehensive educational programs in prisons.
- Ø Given the growing role of information technology in society, policymakers need to determine how to effectively leverage such technology for correctional education and assess its impact on instruction and outcomes (Davis, et al., 2014)

REFERENCES

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