

REMARKS

OF

THE HONORABLE KAROL V. MASON  
ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL  
OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS

AT THE

CHAMPIONS OF CHANGE  
WHITE HOUSE EVENT ON REENTRY AND EMPLOYMENT

ON

MONDAY, JUNE 30, 2014  
WASHINGTON, DC

Thank you, Tonya. I'm delighted to be here and very pleased to appear with you and Chair Berrien, who has been such a terrific leader in this Administration's efforts to reduce barriers to employment for justice-involved individuals. I'd like to thank the White House for hosting this event and for its commitment to reducing recidivism and improving reentry.

I'm very proud to be part of an Administration that has made these issues such a high priority. You can see the level of commitment through the involvement of the White House Domestic Policy Council, leaders like Chair Berrien and Secretary Perez, wonderful colleagues at the Office of Justice Programs like Denise O'Donnell, and of course, my boss, the Attorney General, who chairs the Federal Interagency Reentry Council and has long been a champion of effective reentry.

We're lucky, too, that we have outstanding partners from the private and non-profit sectors – particularly the Council of State Governments Justice Center, which was instrumental in making this event happen and has been an invaluable partner in our work under the Second Chance Act and the Justice Reinvestment Initiative. We're also grateful for the engagement of the Annie E. Casey Foundation in this and other reentry events.

I'm especially thrilled that we were able to bring together so many leaders in business and government to address, head on, the issue of employment and reentry. We know from the research that stable employment is one of the best predictors of success for the reentry population. So it's encouraging to hear how forward-thinking business leaders have opened up avenues to employment for those who have paid their debts and now want to be positive contributors to their families and communities. These employers have stepped out of their comfort zones and taken path-breaking steps that are making a huge difference, not only in the lives of the formerly incarcerated, but in the safety of our communities.

We need to encourage more conversations between business executives and government officials to better understand and address the challenges associated with putting people with criminal records on pathways to employment and productive engagement in their communities. And we need a similar exchange between workforce development experts and corrections professionals. I hope that today's event will serve as a catalyst to begin those conversations. The National Reentry Resource Center stands ready to assist, so I encourage you to reach out to the Resource Center staff about setting up a conversation in your jurisdiction.

At the federal level, we will continue to do our part. Through the work of the Reentry Council and its partner agencies, we've made great strides to improve access to jobs, education, treatment, and a host of services and resources aimed at helping formerly incarcerated individuals reintegrate successfully. We've made substantial investments in job training and job placement through our Second Chance Act programs. We've helped pave the way for better policies by supporting ground-breaking research, like the "redemption" study funded by our National Institute of Justice, which shows that

individuals who remain crime-free for a certain period of time are no more likely to commit offenses than others. And we're working closely with our partners at the Department of Education to improve access to correctional education – for adults and now juveniles – which has been shown to reduce recidivism, boost employment, and save taxpayer dollars.

But the real impact will come at the state and local level – and we've seen some terrific things being done there. Many jurisdictions have adopted “ban the box” policies and are making a concerted effort to educate and engage employers. I'm hopeful that our new investments in this area – which aim to increase the number of employers that adopt best practice standards on the proper use of criminal records in hiring – will bolster these efforts.

There is arguably no better way to ensure that a formerly incarcerated individual will become a productive, contributing member of society than by giving him or her access to a job. I am confident that by working together, we will significantly improve the long-term success rates for our returning citizens finding their way to becoming productive contributors to their communities, and we will have safer communities as a result.

Thank you.

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