

REMARKS  
AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

OF

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

AT THE

AMERICAN SOCIETY OF CRIMINOLOGY  
REENTRY PANEL

ON

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2015  
WASHINGTON, DC

Welcome, everyone. My name is Karol Mason, and I'm the Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Justice Programs in the Department of Justice. I'm pleased to welcome all of you to this panel discussion on reentry and the Second Chance Act. In a moment, you'll hear from several evaluators who've been collecting data on reentry programs funded under the Second Chance Act. But before I turn it over to them, I'd like to say just a few words about the importance of our investments in these programs.

Reentry has been a key focus of our work at the Office of Justice Programs throughout the Obama Administration. The President himself was a clear supporter of the Second Chance Act when he served as senator, and he has championed reentry strategies as a linchpin to criminal justice reform during his time in the White House.

Since 2009, the Office of Justice Programs has made almost 750 Second Chance Act grants totaling more than \$400 million. These funds are being used for the full range of reentry assistance – everything from substance abuse treatment and job training to help with securing driver's licenses, modifying child support orders, and expunging criminal and juvenile records. This year, some \$12.3 million went to support reentry services aimed specifically at youth, and since last year we've made more than \$5 million in Second Chance Act mentoring grants to strengthen relationships between young fathers and their children.

Recently, we announced our first Second Chance Fellow, Daryl Atkinson, who will work in our Bureau of Justice Assistance and with the Federal Interagency Reentry Council. He's a former prisoner who served time after pleading guilty to a low-level non-violent crime. He overcame a host of collateral consequences and is now working as a senior staff attorney for the Southern Coalition for Social Justice. He is a leader in the reentry reform space and we look forward to having him on our team.

The Reentry Council, for those of you who may not know, is chaired by the Attorney General and is made up of cabinet-level leaders and heads of 23 federal agencies. Its mission is to remove federal barriers to reentry and promote approaches designed to improve reintegration.

One recent product of the Council's work is a partnership between the Departments of Justice and Education to provide limited Pell Grant eligibility to incarcerated individuals, a group that's been barred by law from receiving these grants for the past two decades. We believe opening up these educational opportunities is so important. A RAND study funded by our Bureau of Justice Assistance found that education programs for incarcerated adults and juveniles is cost-effective and can reduce recidivism and boost employment.

One of our major priorities at OJP is supporting reentry-related research and data collection. The landmark "Redemption Study" funded by our National Institute of Justice broke new ground in this area. By showing that justice-involved individuals who stay crime-free for a certain period are no more likely to commit new offenses than the

general population, the study provides critical information that could encourage employers to hire people with arrest or criminal records.

Just recently, we saw some positive results from another NIJ study. Researchers looked at recidivism rates related to California's realignment policies and found that counties that prioritized reentry services saw lower rates of re-arrest and re-conviction than counties that focused on traditional enforcement. This is very encouraging.

And of course, as you will hear today, NIJ is in the midst of evaluating our adult and juvenile reentry programs and reentry courts to give us a sense of where our Second Chance programs stand and to help us determine if we need to make adjustments. The presentations today won't give us definitive answers to those questions just yet, but they'll at least give you a peek at the data that are coming in and a sense of what we're beginning to find.

We're proud of all these investments – from research to programming – and we believe they're making a difference, both in the lives of returning individuals and in the safety of our communities. As these studies continue, we're eager to see what the results will show us, and we look forward to building on the progress being made in so many pockets of the country.

Thank you. I'll now turn it over to our presenters.

###