



REP. DANNY K. DAVIS (D-ILL.)



## CBC FORUM FEATURES INITIATIVES AIMED AT REDUCING RECIDIVISM

By Joye Mercer Barksdale  
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## MAKING STRIDES: JOBS COALITION ACCOMPLISHMENTS



While raising awareness of workforce challenges and potential barriers to employment, the JOBS Coalition and its members have combined their resources and industry expertise to achieve the following results:

- > Built the Bellevue Resource Center, a program facility serving the hard-to-reach, hard-to-employ, and returning ex-offender populations. The Center was completed on September 30, 2003.
- > Guided the creation of the Construction & Design Academy at Cardozo, providing District students access, training, and preparation for careers in the construction industry and trades after graduation. The Academy officially opened in September 2005.
- > Leading the Children of Mine Center, in partnership with the Architecture Research Institute at the University of the District of Columbia, in designing, planning and developing a new community center in the Anacostia/Hillsdale community, and restoring the historic home of the city's first mayor. □



**'WE NEED A COMMITMENT'**  
JOBS Board Member Chander Jayaraman (standing) speaks before panelists (from left, seated) Bessie Swann, Margaret Singleton, Drew Hubbard, and Chief Judge Lee F. Satterfield.

## TASK FORCE UNVEILS STANDARDS OF EMPLOYABILITY

### JOBS COALITION CONTINUES EFFORTS TO SUPPORT RETURNING EX-OFFENDERS

Almost a year after the JOBS Coalition convened its forum on the employment challenges facing returning ex-offenders in the Washington Metropolitan area, the Re-Entry Task Force publicly unveiled its standards of employability and sought comments from high-ranking officials within the judicial system, business community, and community-based organizations (CBOs). *By Arnesa A. Howell*

By presenting these “Accords of Corporate, Civic, and Faith-Based Responsibility in the District of Columbia” to key leaders for comment, the Task Force is seeking to fine-tune the standards while adding teeth to efforts to remove employment barriers. At the same time, the Task Force is working to improve training and educational opportunities for city residents who are underserved, unemployed, or returning from incarceration.

The JOBS Coalition and the Re-Entry Task Force are in the preliminary stages of bringing their concerns to the attention of District lawmakers as well. Understanding that collaboration is the key to success, the Accords detail that businesses, CBOs, and the faith-based community must all be part of any joint commitment. Representatives of these groups have already come together in crafting the

multi-pronged approach, developed over a 10-month period. An ad hoc committee worked on general language they believed could be adopted by the formerly incarcerated, agencies, and community- and faith-based organizations. Each entity could then make these general principals more specific to their needs, but with the overall goals remaining the same. But much work is yet to be done in order to push the issue forward and develop measures of success, including a legislative mandate for standards of employability and an industry-wide respected certificate of employability for individuals completing community-based training programs.

“From employers, we need a commitment to work with individuals and recognize that there will be challenges working with those who are formerly incarcerated,” said Chander Jayaraman, project director of the Inclusion Research

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**R**e-entry of ex-offenders into their communities after they've done time in the nation's prisons "continues to be one of the most pernicious problems in the United States—particularly for African Americans," said Rep. Danny K. Davis (D-Ill.) during his annual forum at the Congressional Black Caucus Legislative Conference in September. "But I'm not interested in talking about the problem," he continued. "Problems are like babies: the more you nurse them, the more they grow."

Davis has long been a leader on issues related to the re-entry of ex-offenders and has tackled the problem head on. The congressman spearheaded the Second Chance Act, signed into law in 2008, which has generated a feeling of hope from observers that it will improve the re-entry process. During Davis' forum, Walter L. Fields, Jr., vice president of government relations and public affairs for the Community Service Society of New York, noted that for ex-offenders who may not have had many opportunities, even before their convictions, "the Second Chance Act is really about giving them a first opportunity."

Fields and several other attendees said the Julia Carson Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act of 2009 (H.R. 2979) would build on the Second Chance Act by striving to connect children with parents with whom they do not live. One of its goals is to provide funding for transitional jobs to help so-called "noncustodial" parents meet child support obligations. The Julia Carson Act also includes provisions that could reduce high support payments, and in some cases, reduce the child support debt an ex-offender has accumulated while incarcerated.

### Making a Difference

According to Davis, more than 650,000 offenders are released from state and federal prisons each year to return to a civilian life filled with countless barriers and challenges to overcome. And, because of these obstacles, two out of three ex-offenders re-enter the prison pipeline for new crimes within three years of their release. While the statistics and trends for this population seem bleak, there are programs at both state and local levels striving to help ex-offenders restart their lives and rebuild much-needed family relationships.

Tina Naidoo, executive director of the Texas Offenders Re-Entry Initiative (T.O.R.I.) established in 2005 by The Potter's House (the church created by Bishop T.D. Jakes), estimated that 70,000 former offenders return to the state each year. The Potter's House stepped in to fill the "overwhelming need for

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**CHIEF JUDGE LEE F. SATTERFIELD**  
of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia



**'LET ME APPLAUD THE EFFORTS OF THE JOBS COALITION'** — Margaret Singleton, vp and executive director of the DC Chamber of Commerce Foundation

### Task Force *Continued from page 1*

Institute and a JOBS Coalition board member, at the Standards of Employability Forum held on the campus of the University of the District of Columbia (UDC) on Oct. 22. The forum was held in collaboration with UDC's Office of Community Outreach and Involvement.

The esteemed panelists included Chief Judge Lee F. Satterfield of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia; Margaret Singleton, vice president and executive director of the DC Chamber of Commerce Foundation; Bessie Swann, executive director of Wheeler Creek Community Development Corporation (CDC); and Drew Hubbard, on behalf of D.C. Councilmember Marion Barry (Ward 8).

### Education and Training Key

The Accords—built on the premise that every District citizen should benefit from opportunities of "growth and prosperity" in the city—include standards relating to returning ex-offenders, training providers, employers, and community- and faith-based groups (*see the Accords, page 4*). Spearheaded by the Re-Entry Task Force, the Accords have been under development during a time of economic struggle throughout the city and the nation. Just a day before the forum, the Department of Employment Services announced that the District's unemployment rate had risen to 11.4 percent in September, surpassing the latest national figure of 9.8 percent.

Education and training are key to addressing this citywide problem, said JOBS Coalition President

Rev. Anthony J. Motley. But so is ensuring that the formerly incarcerated are provided a full array of wraparound services—from mental health and housing to transportation and substance abuse treatments—to help them gain and retain employment.

As a result of the economic downturn, states and the District are suffering from gaps in services, noted Satterfield, who having read the Accords, commended them as "certainly mapped" appropriately. He stressed the importance of looking at what can be realistically accomplished when citizens are returning to their communities after incarceration because many have not completed their educations or even received vocational training to help them transition home and into the workforce.

Meanwhile Hubbard, representing Councilmember Barry on the panel, reinforced the thought that the Accords are moving "in the right direction" as they address important issues such as wraparound services. He said it "makes sense" when looking at this target population to focus on these types of issues upfront. At the same time, he reiterated that realistic goals must be set, and local resources like school facilities must be used more effectively to the benefit of the community.

### On the Right Track

Hubbard explained that training for city residents

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Newark Business Administrator Michelle Thomas (left) and Walter L. Fields, Jr. with the Community Service Society of New York focus on the discussion.

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a holistic, wraparound” program.

The program, operating through centers in Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston and San Antonio, has provided services to 5,000 former offenders since its start. It offers the job training, coaching and placement services that are typical for re-entry programs, but also includes counseling and mentoring components that focus on reunifying families and strengthening marriages. T.O.R.I. provides faith-based mentors and chaplaincy services for former offenders and mentors for their children through Big Brothers Big Sisters.

One of T.O.R.I.’s unique components is the community service requirement. “Our clients have to go out and serve the underserved. Serving others empowers them, because they are no longer the borrowers, but the lenders,” Naidoo explained. T.O.R.I. also assists with housing by getting private homeowners to provide transitional housing, an important supportive service since many former offenders are denied housing when background checks reveal criminal records.

### Booker Backs Re-Entry Programs

Mayor Cory Booker of Newark, N.J. saw a similar need for wraparound services and made ex-offender re-entry one of his priorities when he was elected in 2006, said Michelle Thomas, business administrator for Newark. Through Operation Reconnect, Newark’s one-stop portal, ex-offenders can access a variety of services—from checking in with parole officers and obtaining food stamps to job training and earning a GED.

## JOBS Coalition Pathways

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The *JOBS Coalition Pathways* is the exclusive property of the JOBS Coalition, 4409 South Capital Street, SW Washington, D.C. 20032; 202-373-1959. *JOBS Coalition Pathways* is dedicated to disseminating information that will help strengthen the city’s apprenticeship training and job placement programs, broadening the scope to reach the young, the underserved, the unemployed and the returning ex-offender. *JOBS Coalition Pathways* is published by the Jobs Coalition.

The program includes Newark Re-Entry Legal Services (ReLeSe), which helps the formerly incarcerated overcome persistent barriers to returning to their communities by providing volunteer lawyers to assist with civil legal matters, such as reinstating a driver’s license or expunging a criminal record. Understanding the employment challenges many returning ex-offenders face after release, Newark is working with a nonprofit that will train ex-offenders for jobs in eco-friendly extermination.

Key to all of Newark’s re-entry efforts is a central database that houses information and tracks all contacts ex-offenders have had with any of these initiatives, Thomas said. “No matter what the service is, anyone [with authorization] can look in the database and see what other services have been provided, and then tailor their response based on an overall understanding of the ex-offender’s situation,” she said.

By 2010, Newark hopes to enroll 1,340 ex-offenders in its re-entry services through Operation Reconnect. Half of the slots will be for violent ex-offenders. Because federal funds often will not provide support for ex-offenders convicted of violent crimes, Newark has teamed with The Nicholson Foundation—which focuses in part on offender re-entry—for assistance.

### Connecting with Youth

New Jersey is not alone in its commitment to helping those who have been incarcerated. In Illinois, the One Family One Child program is dedicated to helping formerly imprisoned youth. Among other things, the nonprofit focuses on connecting children who have been in the juvenile justice system with mentors, as well as foster and adoptive parents. The program—through partnerships with 250 churches—is designed to decrease recidivism, reduce drug and alcohol abuse, teach young people life skills and, ultimately, to help them become productive citizens. Says Reanetta Hunt, the organization’s executive director: “We’ve walked children out of jails and into high schools and colleges.” □

## DISTRICT PROGRAM OFFERS MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

**M**ore than 10 percent of the United States population suffers from mental health disorders. But in America’s jails and prisons, the proportion rises to 56 percent, according to estimates by the United States Department of Justice. In Washington, D.C., the D.C. Jail Advocacy Project aids incarcerated people with psychiatric disabilities who are within 90 days of release by representing them in courts, training corrections officers to deal with them, and pushing for legal reforms and fair treatment.

The project, created in 2007, is part of University Legal Services, a federally mandated agency in the District that advocates for people with disabilities.

Gretchen Rohr, project director for the D.C. Jail Advocacy Project, said during Rep. Danny K. Davis’ forum on re-entry of formerly incarcerated men and women, that ex-offenders often struggle with mental disorders on their own because of stigma, or standard punitive responses to mental health issues. “When it comes to mental health, we haven’t yet embraced the recovery vocabulary,” she said. “But there is so much that works.”

Among the strategies that Rohr recommends is one involving crisis intervention teams comprised of specially trained law enforcement officers, mental health professionals, and advocates for the mentally ill who respond when a police dispatcher receives a service call possibly involving a person with mental illness.

She added that mental health courts are also helping divert people from jail and get them into much-needed treatments as well.

These special courts, designed to reduce recidivism, involve collaborations between the criminal justice system and mental health professionals to help ex-offenders with mental health needs receive treatment instead of jail time, in certain cases. Of the 170 people appearing in the District’s mental health courts this year, only 8 percent were sent to jail.

Rohr lamented that too few people in correctional facilities receive the treatment they need. “Little more than medication is available to millions of people with serious mental illness who go through our nation’s jails and prisons every year,” she said. “Communities need to reinvest correctional spending on treatment services and supportive housing that are proven to more effectively address mental health needs and prevent this vulnerable population from winding up behind bars again.”—JMB □

## **Task Force** *Continued from page 2*

is already a priority: “\$4.6 million is in the budget for adult training this coming year.” Any groups tapping into these funds must show they are tracking placements, he added.

The nonprofit Wheeler Creek Community Development Corporation provides ex-offenders and other in-need residents with comprehensive job readiness training and skill-building to help them become economically stable as they return to their communities. Bessie Swann, Wheeler Creek CDC’s executive director, asserted that she is “100 percent in sync” with the Accords and Standards of Employability and is working with the JOBS Coalition to make the standards more applicable to the District.

### **Overcoming Employer Challenges**

A recurring concern among some employers that earlier met with the Task Force was their liability when hiring returning citizens. On that issue, Singleton said that the training to be provided and the completion of a transitional employment program would act as incentives for employers to hire ex-offenders.

She added that a “continued dialogue with a referring agency and greater success in employer hiring decisions are likely to occur if employers are able to get greater liability insurance coverage, assistance with background checks, and have had previous positive experiences with placement.” □

# THE ACCORDS

Standards relating to the formerly incarcerated:

1. Be in compliance with all requirements associated with re-entry (parole, etc.), Parole Commission.
2. Must be in compliance with CSOSA (report regularly to Community Supervisor Officer).
3. Must be willing to participate in our efforts to employ them.
4. Family engagement (where appropriate).

Standards relating to the training provider:

1. Will stay abreast of best practices and employment trends.
2. Maintain a history of positive work outcomes.
3. Provide reliable screening and assessment tools.
4. Must have a reliable documenting and tracking mechanism in place.
5. Must be willing to be periodically assessed by a to-be-named accrediting organization.

Standards relating to the employer:

1. Must be willing to be open-minded to the challenges of hiring unemployed, under-employed, and the formerly incarcerated.
2. Must be willing to engage in a continuing dialogue with a referred agency for a specified period of time.

Standards relating to the community- and faith-based groups:

1. Provide wraparound services in every Ward of the city.
2. Provide space and transportation where required.
3. Provide volunteers to assist in supporting individuals and families.

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