



JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE
SENATOR CHARLES E. SCHUMER, CHAIRMAN
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Statement of Carolyn Maloney, Vice Chair
Joint Economic Committee Hearing
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Good morning. I would like to thank Chairman Schumer for holding this hearing to examine the economic, political, and social costs of incarceration. I also want to thank Senator Webb for chairing.

The United States has the highest incarceration rates in the world, with more than 2 million Americans currently in jails or prisons. Clearly, imprisonment benefits society and is an important public safety measure. But faced with an unprecedented increase in incarceration, we must ask ourselves whether we are striking the right balance between the costs and benefits of imprisonment.

Putting more resources into creating economic opportunities that provide alternatives to crime would pay dividends in reducing crime and incarceration, while also strengthening families and communities.

We all know that in the long run crime doesn't pay, but it sure is costly. The average annual cost of incarceration for one federal prisoner exceeds \$20,000 – far more than the average annual cost of \$3,700 for a youth program, \$6,000 for a job training program or the \$13,000 for tuition at public universities.

There is no question that crime rates have dropped in the U.S. over the past decade. Researchers agree that the increase in incarceration rates have been driven by tougher sentences for repeat offenders and drug offenders, mandatory minimums, and a more punitive approach to post-release supervision, rather than an increase in crime.

The racial dimension of incarceration is inescapable. Half of our prison population is African American, yet they represent just 13 percent of the population as a whole. It has become a sad truth that a black man in his late twenties without a high school diploma is more likely to be in jail than to be working. The effect on black communities has been devastating.

As noted Harvard sociologist Orlando Patterson wrote in the *New York Times* recently, one in three African American males in their 30s now has a prison record. He somberly noted, "These numbers and rates are incomparably greater than anything achieved at the height of the Jim Crow era."

Women are typically convicted of nonviolent offenses. Most women who enter the criminal justice system have experienced physical or sexual abuse, and many have physical or mental health problems. These inmates may actually benefit from alternatives to imprisonment, such as suspended sentences coupled with extensive counseling.

When mothers are incarcerated, their children may be placed in foster care, or with other family members who then need financial assistance to provide for the children. Moreover, the removal of a significant family member can affect the healthy development of children.

The Catholic Charities Diocese of Brooklyn and Queens operate a week-long summer camp that provides opportunities for incarcerated mothers to have quality time with their children. Such programs serve as a means to maintain family bonds, and possibly provide a smoother transition and resumption of parental responsibilities upon release. If this program shows success, it could serve as a model for the nation.

Providing employment and training assistance for ex-offenders is critical to reducing barriers to employment, and it benefits families. I support the Second Chance Act of 2007, which provides grants for re-entry programs that provide mentoring, academic and vocation education, and employment assistance, and substance abuse treatment for ex-offenders.

I look forward to hearing from our distinguished panel about how best to protect public safety, while addressing the many costs of imprisonment.

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