

**TESTIMONY OF
ALPHONSO ALBERT
JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE
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The Second Chances program is a program sponsored by the city of Norfolk to assist non-violent offenders that are returning back into the local community after being incarcerated in jail and prison.

Over the past eight years, Second Chances has served more than 1200 offenders, provided more than 900 jobs at an average wage of \$9.00 per hour and maintained a 73% employment retention rate over one year period. Additionally, Second Chances has implemented programs to serve children of incarcerated parents, opened a permanent supportive housing initiative to provide housing for offenders that are homeless upon their return and started three business enterprises that hire program participants at a minimum of \$ 8 per hour and \$12 per hour with benefits when they have drivers license.

There is a collateral cost to incarceration however, that is rarely observed or talked about but one that comes back to haunt society in so many other ways. The cost is one that impacts families and children of incarcerated individuals. Most incarcerated individuals have families and many of them have children that grow-up themselves to be incarcerated. The fact that a child that lives in a household with a loved one or family member that has been incarcerated and will likely be incarcerated themselves when they grow up is due in large measure to the fact that the same conditions that existed for the adult will exist for the child unless there is some intervening factors. Limited education, lack of positive role model, poor housing conditions, abuse, etc. are all factors that contribute. The Second Chances staff recently conducted a survey of women in the Norfolk City jail that were within 90 days of release. The results of the survey indicated that and that 34 women had children between the ages of 4- 18, only 9 of the 34 had legal custody of their children, 25 or the 34 self reported as having problems with substance abuse or addiction, 16 admitted having damaged relationship with family as a result of their addiction, and 27 acknowledged that they needed some type of parenting class or training in order to be a better parents.

The greatest challenge that we face on a daily basis in helping offenders make a positive transition from prison back into the community (getting out and staying out as productive citizens) is pre- release planning and post release services. The department of corrections provides limited training opportunities for returning offenders and has only recently began focusing re-entry planning as a part of their overall strategy for helping offenders make a smooth transition back into local communities. More often than not, the issues of no proper identification, no birth certificates, limited pre-release plans, no post release services, housing and lack of job leads, financial burden and hardship are all things that stifle the offenders and prevent the individual from having a positive re-entry experience. These factors also lead to recidivism and relapse in so many of the cases that we see on a daily basis.

Recently, the State of Virginia became one of seven states around the country to participate in the National Governors Association Reentry Policy Academy. Virginia subsequently established five pilot programs around the State that focused on providing pre-release planning and post release services. The challenge to these pilot sites however, is lack of funding. Lack of funding means no counselors to work with offenders prior to release in getting proper Identification, birth certificates and a total of all fines, court cost, child support, restitution and other financial obligations prior to release. Funding at the federal level would also support staffing that helps offenders with job leads, housing placement, job training and other post release services. It is my opinion that funding for reentry programs that provide pre and post release planning as well as job placement, case management and follow-up aftercare should be made available in order to help prevent recidivism, strengthen families, and promote healthy communities through the concept of investing in our human infrastructure at a time when we can least afford not to do so.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony to this committee and I would be pleased to answer any further questions.