



**Statement of the D.C. Reentry Action Network
Before the Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety
and the Committee on Facilities and Procurement
of the Council of the District of Columbia**

**“Moving the Office on Returning Citizen Affairs Amendment Act of 2019”
January 23, 2020**

Good morning, Chairman Allen, Chairman White, and members of the committees. This testimony is submitted on behalf of the D.C. Reentry Action Network (RAN). We want to begin by thanking you Chairman Allen, Chairman White, members of the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety, and members of the Committee on Facilities and Procurement for prioritizing reentry work and for recognizing the vital importance of reentry support in the District of Columbia.

Formed in 2017, RAN is a coalition of nonprofit organizations that provide direct reentry-specific services to justice-involved District residents. Since its inception, RAN members have worked tirelessly to build a community of reentry service providers that allow the coalition to speak as a collective voice on reentry in the District and positively impact the lives of our returning citizen neighbors. RAN strives to ensure that all justice-involved people in the District have access to high quality reentry services to support their successful reintegration and promotes community-based alternatives to end D.C.’s over-reliance on the criminal justice system.



This testimony is in support of Bill 23-0443, the “Moving the Office on Returning Citizen Affairs Amendment Act of 2019.” RAN supports this legislation because the Office on Returning Citizen Affairs’ (ORCA’s) inclusion in the Public Safety & Justice (PSJ) cluster will better enable ORCA to fulfill its mission to “coordinate and monitor service delivery to returning citizens ... [and] promote the general welfare, empowerment, and reintegration of returning citizens in the areas of employment and workforce development, health care, education, housing, and social services.” A mission, that when fulfilled, directly benefits our clients and improves their reentry outcomes. Given that one of RAN’s functions is to connect effective, local, client-centered reentry service providers to exchange knowledge, strengthen services and give voice to a historically underserved population in our city – people returning home from incarceration – RAN is invested in ORCA’s success and fulfillment of its mission.

Moving ORCA Increases Inter-Agency Communications

RAN and ORCA share the same goals. One of the goals of RAN is to prioritize the needs of returning citizens in Washington, DC while providing access to quality and potentially life-saving resources. Part of ensuring access to high quality reentry services across the District is having open, transparent communication between organizations and agencies providing reentry services. Unfortunately, ORCA is not well-positioned to have these inter-agency collaborations in the Community Affairs cluster, as it would if housed under Public Safety & Justice. RAN member organizations have heard that the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) can’t share information with ORCA because it is not in the Public Safety & Justice office. RAN needs to have full access to accurate information regarding the status of D.C. Code



Offenders housed in the BOP: housing status, services provided during incarceration, and projected release dates. While RAN members can see most people's release dates using the Bureau of Prison's locator when we have the person's name in advance, the real issue is when we do not have the names in advance. As it stands, we are unable to get a general list in advance of people returning home from the BOP to the District – meaning we are unable to conduct outreach to everyone being released within a certain period. Since incarceration is a public record, RAN believes D.C. should be provided with a regular list of people scheduled for release within the next six months, updated every month. Then D.C. can provide this list to reentry service providers so that they, including many RAN members, can follow best practices and in-reach and reentry planning ahead of release.

Moving ORCA to PSJ would allow the BOP to share information with ORCA. ORCA must have open communication, coordinated strategies, and clearly-delineated accountability to and with other District agencies that provide reentry issues and support or serve returning citizens. Increased information sharing means more quickly connecting our neighbors returning home from incarceration with services that are critical to their survival, and ultimately ability to thrive in their communities.

Not Serving Returning Citizens in the Community Affairs Cluster

The Mayor's Office of Community Affairs (MOCA) "is the essential connection between District of Columbia residents and the Executive Office of the Mayor."¹ MOCA ensures "open and continuous engagement" between residents and the Mayor through "partnerships with communities, conduct[ing] and

¹ *About MOCA*. Retrieved from <https://moca.dc.gov/page/about-moca>.



coordinat[ing] events, town hall, forums, and projects.”² Though it is only a portion of ORCA’s work, the most dynamic and time-intensive portion of ORCA’s mission is coordinating and monitoring service delivery to returning citizens. To do this, ORCA’s staff conducts targeted outreach to returning citizens, develops reentry plans, performs needs assessments, connects returning citizens to services, and provides continued case management to support its clients’ long-term reentry success.³ This is the work that would be well served, and better supported, in closer collaboration with the PSJ cluster.

RAN member organizations regularly hear from our returning citizen clients that they show up to ORCA during regular business hours only to find that the office is closed because staff is assisting at a mayoral event unrelated to reentry. By diverting staff who specialize in reentry-related work, office closures do not consider that returning citizens’ have limited time and transportation resources. Additionally, receiving services from ORCA may mean the difference between receiving resources, or being connected to resources, that can help someone returning home receive SNAP or TANF and feed themselves and their family. Having ORCA closed for mayoral events unrelated to reentry is unacceptable, and negatively impacts our returning citizen neighbors as they seek the resources they need to successfully reenter the community.

Integrating ORCA in PSJ Cluster

² *Id.*

³ *MORCA Phase II Strategic Planning Report*. September 2018. Retrieved from https://orca.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/orca/page_content/attachments/MORCA%20Strategic%20Plan_0.pdf.



The Office of the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice (DMPSJ) oversees the Department of Corrections (DOC), the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants Administration (OVSJG), and the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement, all three of which run or fund programming for returning citizens in D.C. The DOC in turn runs the Resources to Empower and Develop You (READY) Center, which works closely with RAN. Eric Weaver, Deputy Director of the READY Center, regularly attends RAN member meetings and provides updates on the number of returning citizens served at the READY Center. The DMPSJ's FY 2019 PAR stated that bringing these agencies, including the newly added Office of Human Rights and Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services, into the cluster allowed "interagency initiatives and cross-pollination to occur."⁴ This is precisely the impact that RAN believes will result from adding ORCA to the cluster. As mentioned above, ORCA will also benefit from data sharing and accountability to performance metrics within the PSJ cluster. In addition, OVSJG grantees coordinate referrals among grantees and report outcomes data using the Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) database. OVSJG releases an annual report about returning citizens' service needs and needs addressed by their grantees. As part of the PSJ cluster, ORCA could use ETO to become integrated with OVSJG-funded providers, enhancing services to returning citizens, decreasing duplicative referrals and runaround for returning citizens, and creating more data on which the city and public can rely for informed decision making. Given the overlap between ORCA's mission and the population it serves, and the missions of and populations served by the aforementioned agencies, moving ORCA to PSJ just makes sense.

⁴ *Id.*



Conclusion

Moving OCRA to the PSJ cluster will better equip ORCA to fulfill its mission to support the nearly 2,000 people who return to the District from the BOP each year and the nearly 10,000 people who cycle through the DOC.⁵ RAN endorses this bill and is eager to continue supporting all of the District's efforts to ensure the successful reentry of all D.C.'s returning citizens. Thank you for your time and attention.

⁵ Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, *10-Year Estimate of Justice-Involved Individuals in the District of Columbia*. September 2018. Retrieved from <https://cjcc.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cjcc/publication/attachments/Ten-Year%20Estimate%20of%20Justice-Involved%20Individuals.pdf>.