

Written Statement of
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Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies
Hearing on an Assessment of Reentry Initiatives, Recidivism and Corrections Spending

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THE NEW FRONTIER OF PUBLIC SAFETY

INTRODUCTION

In the 1980s and 1990s as a Virginia State Senator and Attorney General, I believed in law and order. I still do. What I did not realize at the time is that there are two equally important aspects to public safety. First, is getting the right people off the streets and behind bars. Second, is providing opportunities for personal transformation to those behind bars so that when they return home they will not still pose a threat to public safety.

My approach at the time was biased to the front end of the problem. I initiated or supported any bill that put more people behind bars and kept them there longer. I seldom voted against any crime bill. I was not alone. Legislators of all stripes at the state and federal level were getting tough on crime. As a result, America now incarcerates more people than any other nation in the world and at a higher per capita rate than any other nation in the world.¹ For a person who believes that less is more when it comes to government, I helped turn the correctional system into one of the biggest government programs in the world. According to a research report published in 2008 by the Pew Center on the States, one out of every thirty-one adults in the United States is locked up or on probation or parole.² Not only have we supersized government, we have fueled a system that does not work. Thousands of inmates are released every year in America and national studies show that more than half end up behind bars within three years.³ Correctional systems are failing to “correct” the behavior of inmates. For the most part, they are simply warehousing them. After sweeping the streets clean of “criminals,” they are now coming home in record numbers—but the public is not safe. Released inmates are reoffending at a rate of 50%⁴ and creating more victims, eating up more taxpayer dollars, and adding fuel to bigger government.

The good news is that we can reduce the mass incarceration trend, advance public safety, shrink government, and save taxpayers dollars if we will begin to focus on providing meaningful opportunities for personal transformation to those behind bars who want to change their lives. This article suggests that the key is not more money pumped into corrections for a few pilot programs (most of which are never

1. PEW CHARITABLE TRUSTS, ONE IN 100: BEHIND BARS IN AMERICA 2008, at 5 (2008), available at http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/sentencing_and_corrections/one_in_100.pdf.

2. PEW CHARITABLE TRUSTS, ONE IN 31: THE LONG REACH OF AMERICAN CORRECTIONS 5 (2009), available at http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/uploadedFiles/PSPP_1in31_report_FINAL_WEB_3-26-09.pdf.

3. Michael Lollar *Recidivism Rate Worse Than Statistics Indicate, Memphis-area Study Finds*, MEMPHIS COMMERCIAL APPEAL, March 10, 2010, available at <http://www.commercialappeal.com/news/2010/mar/07/recidivism-rate-worse-study-finds/>.

4. *Id.*

brought to scale because of cost), but to unleash the power of partnerships between community-based organizations, volunteers, and departments of corrections. By allowing volunteers with community-based non-profits unprecedented access to inmates to provide life changing relationships, recidivism could be significantly reduced and public safety increased. It requires strong executive leadership in government and partnership with community-based nonprofits and volunteers who utilize evidence-based best practices for cognitive and life transformation and are held accountable for achieving the goal of lower recidivism.

I. THE PRICE OF A BIG GOVERNMENT APPROACH TO PUBLIC SAFETY

A. Loss of Human Capital and Freedom

Prior to 1972, the prison population tended to grow at a steady rate that closely tracked growth rates in the general population. Beginning in 1973, the number of incarcerated Americans began to rise precipitously, due to legislation that stiffened sentencing and release laws and decisions by courts and parole boards that sent more offenders to prison and kept them there longer.⁵ Also, fueling the fire were the breakdown of family structure, particularly the growing absence of fathers, the proliferation of drugs, and the de-institutionalization of the mentally disabled. Incarcerated drug offenders soared 1,200% and the rate of mentally ill people in prisons rather than in mental health hospitals has quadrupled.⁶

Today more than 2.3 million individuals are behind bars. With 5% of the world's population, the U.S. now houses 25% of the world's reported prisoners.⁷ Today, a staggering 1 out of every 100 adults in our nation is behind bars.⁸ And, even more sobering, 1 out of every 31 adults is either behind bars or on probation or parole.⁹

The demographic picture becomes more miserable: For the African American community, the growth in incarceration has been nothing short of catastrophic. Black adults are four times as likely as whites and nearly 2.5 times as likely as Hispanics to be under correctional control. One in eleven black adults—9.2%—is either behind bars or on probation or parole.¹⁰

B. Wasteful Stewardship of Taxpayers' Money

The increase in incarceration and stubborn recidivism rates result in a huge cost to the taxpayers: over \$68 billion will be spent on corrections in 2010.¹¹ Second only to Medicaid, spending on corrections has become the fastest growing general fund expenditure in the nation.¹² State spending on corrections has

5. PEW CHARITABLE TRUSTS, PRISON COUNT 2010: STATE POPULATION DECLINES FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 38 YEARS 1 (2010), available at http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/uploadedFiles/Prison_Count_2010.pdf?n=880 (citing Alfred Blumstein & Allen J. Beck, *Reentry as a Transient State Between Liberty and Recombitment*, in PRISON REENTRY AND CRIME IN AMERICA 50-79 (Jeremy Travis & Christy Visher eds., 2005)).

6. Alfred Blumstein and Allen J. Beck, *Reentry as a Transient State Between Liberty and Recombitment*, in PRISONER REENTRY AND CRIME IN AMERICA 50, 62 (Jeremy Travis & Christy Visher eds., 2005)].

7. PEW CHARITABLE TRUSTS, *supra* note 2, at 5.

8. *Id.* at 3.

9. PEW CHARITABLE TRUSTS, *supra* note 3, at 3.

10. PEW CHARITABLE TRUSTS, *supra* note 3, at 5.

11. *Id.* at 11.

12. PEW CHARITABLE TRUSTS, *supra* note 3, at 1.

increased over \$40 billion in the last 20 years, up over 30% in the past 10 years alone.¹³ The current approach to incarceration is breaking the bank. If for no other reason, the stress on state budgets—in no small part due to burgeoning correctional system budgets—has finally captured the attention of policymakers and focused their efforts on the poor return they are getting for their dollars.

C. Compromising Public Safety

Indeed, if the billions spent nationwide ensured that prisoners would return to our neighborhoods in greater numbers as peaceful, productive, and law-abiding citizens, we might argue that it was money well spent. But according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, of the hundreds of thousands of inmates that leave prisons and return home, two-thirds will be rearrested and almost one-half re-incarcerated within three years.¹⁴ Is it too much to suggest that prisons resemble graduate schools of crime more than places of correction and rehabilitation? With a 50% recidivism rate after three years, public safety is corroded on the back end of the criminal justice system.

“What happens inside jails and prisons does not stay inside jails and prisons. It comes home with prisoners after they are released. . . .”¹⁵ Indeed, all too often inmates return home more criminally savvy and prepared to fail at real life than before they went in. No other enterprise could remain in business with such a dismal performance and return on investment. Yet, prisons seem to expand by failing.

To ensure public safety, save taxpayers dollars, and reverse the trend toward mass incarceration, we must start by seeking the transformation of individuals in prison to get them ready to come home. Departments of Corrections and Rehabilitation should be living up to their names.

II. REDUCING RECIDIVISM THROUGH PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION OF PRISONERS

As Doris Layton MacKenzie described in *What Works in Correction*—a review of the literature on effective strategies for the incarcerated—attitudes and philosophies on “what works” to change lives behind bars has shifted drastically during the past thirty or forty years.¹⁶ MacKenzie’s examination of studies that researched how changes in thinking can affect attitude and behavior (cognitive-behavior) in offenders has cast a new light on how we look at corrections. As a result, some experts and policymakers have begun to move away from an emphasis on a crime control model, which fostered slogans such as the “war on drugs” and “truth in sentencing,” and toward more evidence-based strategies in which individual-level changes occur in prisoners that then allow them to go on to make better life choices. MacKenzie also notes that criminals “think differently than noncriminals either because they have dysfunctional information processing and coping skills or a lower level of moral development.”¹⁷

One of MacKenzie’s theories is that “one mechanism by which education will affect recidivism is through improvement of inmate cognitive skills. The way individuals think influences whether they violate the law. . . . Other research demonstrates a connection between executive cognitive functioning

13. PEW CHARITABLE TRUSTS, *supra* note 2, at 11 (citing PEW CHARITABLE TRUSTS, PUBLIC SAFETY, PUBLIC SPENDING: FORECASTING AMERICA’S PRISON POPULATION 2007-2011 II (2007)). Source includes page number as ii instead of 2.

14. Langan, Dr. Patrick A., and Dr. David J. Levin, “Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994,” U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics (2002), <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/rpr94.pdf>, *supra* note 6, at 1.

15. THE COMMISSION ON SAFETY AND ABUSE IN AMERICA’S PRISONS, CONFRONTING CONFINEMENT 11 (2006).

16. DORIS LAYTON MACKENZIE, WHAT WORKS IN CORRECTIONS: REDUCING THE CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES OF OFFENDERS AND DELINQUENTS 337 (2006).

17. *Id.* at 113.

(ECF) and antisocial behavior. ECF is defined as the cognitive functioning required in planning, initiation and regulation of goal-directed behavior.”¹⁸ MacKenzie concludes that “individual-level change must precede changes in ties or bonds to social institutions. . . . To get along with family, keep a job, support children, or form strong, positive ties with other institutions, the person must change in cognitive reasoning, attitude toward drug use, anti-social attitudes, reading level and vocation skills. A focus on individual change is critical to our understanding of what works in corrections.”¹⁹

These studies show that when inmates complete cognitive-behavior programs, they have a much better chance to develop and to follow an internal moral compass.

The public is more than ready for an approach to corrections that does not merely warehouse but seeks opportunities for inmates to change their behavior. A 2006 Zogby International public opinion poll commissioned by the National Council of Crime and Delinquency found that a striking majority of American voters support pre- and post-release rehabilitative programming.²⁰ Of those polled, “79 percent are concerned or fearful about the annual release of 700,000 prisoners,” and “by almost an 8 to 1 margin (87%to 11%), the US voting public is in favor of rehabilitative services for prisoners as opposed to a punishment-only system.” Additionally, “[b]y strong majorities, U.S. voters feel that a lack of life skills, the experience of being in prison, and obstacles to reentry are major factors in the rearrest of prisoners after release.” Furthermore, “[b]y huge margins, those polled felt that job training, drug treatment, mental health services, family support, mentoring and housing were all very important services that should be offered to prisoners.” Perhaps one of the most astounding findings was that “44%felt that planning for reentry should begin at sentencing.”²¹

The results of these polls are helpful for policymakers when trying to understand public perception. With 2.3 million people behind bars there is no one who does not know someone in prison. And they know many of them are not lost causes.

III. THE NEED FOR PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN CORRECTIONS AND COMMUNITY-BASED NONPROFITS

It is my thesis, that when it comes to rehabilitation of prisoners, the state, by its very nature, will not and cannot do the job. Having served in the Virginia senate for ten years and as Virginia’s attorney general for four, I know only too well that in times of fiscal stress, correctional budgets are the first to be cut. Within those budgets, rehabilitation and educational programs are the first and proportionally the deepest cuts that tend to be made. That is not likely to change in the real-world competition for dollars. Even when state treasuries are bulging, these efforts historically receive relatively low priority because of demand in other “high profile” areas such as education and transportation. But even if these realities changed overnight and prisoner rehabilitation and reentry became the number one priority of state governments, government agencies are by nature woefully incapable of rehabilitation that transforms.

State employees cannot primarily deliver prisoner rehabilitation and reentry efforts. For starters, it is anything but a nine to five job. Instead, such efforts must be delivered through properly trained volunteers

18. *Id.* at 113.

19. *Id.* at 337.

20. Barry Krisberg & Susan Marchionna, *Attitudes of US Voters Toward Prisoner Rehabilitation and Reentry Policies*, NAT’L COUNCIL ON CRIME & DELINQ. FOCUS, April 2006, available at <http://www.policyarchive.org/handle/10207/bitstreams/5943.pdf>

21. *Id.* at 1

in the community through loving relationships that are patient, nurturing, sacrificial, holistic, tough, and able to sustain a genuine long-term commitment to the welfare of prisoners and ex-prisoners. These efforts must be administered by those who believe that darkness can be overcome by light, evil by good, fear by faith, despair by hope, and addiction by freedom. They must be delivered by men and women who believe that transformed prisoners and ex-prisoners, in spite of and precisely because of their past, are uniquely situated to contribute to society because they have experienced brokenness, forgiveness, and restoration.

Rehabilitation must be rooted in transformation of the heart, dispositions, and character. It must equip prisoners with the knowledge and skills for productive work. It must be characterized not by a systems approach, but by a relational (mentoring) approach. It must begin in prison and continue for up to two years after release from prison—a critical transitional stage. And since it will not and cannot be provided primarily by the state, it must be provided by community-based nonprofits and volunteers.

To focus on the importance of rehabilitation is not “soft on crime,” nor does it compromise public safety. Indeed, the State has a duty to protect the public, restore the victim, guard the treasury, and ensure the safety of inmates in prison. A commitment to rehabilitation is consistent with each of these goals. Correspondingly, failing to provide rehabilitation compromises each one of them. For without rehabilitative efforts that transform, inmates are more of a threat upon release than when they were sentenced, more victims are created, more taxpayer money is spent for the same thing over and over again, and inmates are at a greater risk of violence and criminal corruption in prison. Such an understanding is leading to public support of bold new initiatives in rehabilitation and a willingness to become personally involved in this community-based partnership with the state.

“The partnership between governments and nonprofits for purposes of rehabilitation and reentry is not new. What is new is the large-scale interest developing among nonprofits and faith-based nonprofits coupled with a willingness to spend their own money as opposed to government grants. Indeed, the renaissance in rehabilitation spearheaded by nonprofits need not be fueled by government funds. Some limited application of grants may be helpful in developing prototypes, but in the long run the prison population is too large and the needs in rehabilitation too intensely relational to be realistically supported by the government. This can and should be a movement overwhelmingly sustained by volunteerism and philanthropy, and the correctional system must welcome and adapt to the partnership.”²²

IV. EXAMPLES OF WORKING PARTNERSHIPS THAT REDUCE RECIDIVISM

A. Boston Reentry Initiative (BRI)

BRI is an initiative to help transition violent young adult offenders released back to their neighborhoods through mentoring, social service assistance, and vocational development provided by both government and community-based nonprofits. Faced with a growing crime rate, city and state officials called on four community-based nonprofits—Nation of Islam, Ella J. Baker House, Bruce Wall Ministries, and Boston Ten Point Coalition—to help develop solutions. They worked with young men eighteen to thirty years of age who were considered at-risk of resuming a criminal life upon release. Focusing on mentoring, education, vocational training, and treatment for substance abuse and mental

22. Mark L. Earley, *The Role of Nonprofits in the Rehabilitation of Prisoners*, CRIM. JUST. ETHICS, Winter-Spring 2005, at 2, 58.

health issues, a customized transition plan was developed for each offender. The mentors were volunteers from a nonprofit partner located in the offender's neighborhood.

Evaluations of a non-randomized study conducted by a team of Harvard and Perdue criminal justice experts found that the BRI was strikingly successful in reducing recidivism in one of the toughest age groups.²³ The study found that after one year post-release, 36.1% of BRI participants had been arrested for a new crime while 51.1% of control group subjects had been arrested for a new crime. Harvard's Anthony Braga concluded that, "not only is it possible to provide services to this tough-to-reach population, it is possible to do so effectively."²⁴

B. Prison Fellowship

In 1997, Prison Fellowship developed and staffed a program called the InnerChange Freedom Initiative (IFI) in Texas. It is a pre-release program that inmates can volunteer for eighteen to twenty-four months prior to their release. It is a holistic approach to individual transformation and readiness for release focusing on the intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical. The spiritual component of the program is based on the life and teachings of Jesus. The in-prison portion addresses academics, life-skills training, spiritual development, and job preparation. It is followed by several months of post-prison support to ensure that released prisoners have the best opportunity to successfully reintegrate into society. For each program, hundreds of volunteers from the community are trained to work with and mentor the inmates.

IFI was designed to incorporate mentoring as an essential part of the program and the goal is for each prisoner to be assigned a mentor both in prison and upon release. The importance of a caring and accountable relationship during incarceration and after release is crucial for the inmate's successful return home. Nowhere is that seen more clearly than in the University of Pennsylvania study released in 2003. Most significantly, the study found that IFI graduates were significantly less likely to be rearrested within two years of release than those inmates who had started, but not completed, the program (17.3% versus 35%) and less likely to be reincarcerated (8% versus 36.3%).²⁵

C. La Bodega de la Familia

One partnership showing great promise, not only in intervention, but also having application for the successful reentry of inmates, is La Bodega de la Familia. In 1996, Family Justice, a New York City-based nonprofit, launched a family support initiative in a small New York City storefront that had seen a number of drug deals and murders on its sidewalk. The idea was to introduce new methods to engage families struggling with addiction and mental illness in order to help them keep their loved ones out of prison or jail. Emphasizing prevention as well as intervention, the nonprofit partnered with a wide range of strategic partners, including government agencies (such as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development) and often community-based organizations (such as the Langeloth Foundation and the Minuchin Family Center) to create a new paradigm. They focused on the strengths, rather than the deficits, of poor families to end multi-generational patterns of substance abuse and violence. According to

23. Anthony Braga et al., *Controlling Violent Offenders Released to the Community: An Evaluation of the Boston Reentry Initiative*, 46 J. OF RES. CRIME & DELINQ., 411, (2009), available at <http://jrc.sagepub.com/content/46/4/411.full.pdf+html>.

24. *Id.* at 427.

25. Byron R. Johnson, *The InnerChange Freedom Initiative: A Preliminary Evaluation of a Faith-Based Prison Program*, 2003 CENTER FOR RES. ON RELIGION AND URB. CIV. SOC. REP. 19, available at http://www.manhattan-institute.org/pdf/crrucs_innerchange.pdf.

La Bodega's founding director Carol Shapiro, "We saw that outcomes improve when law-enforcement officers and community-service providers build on the strengths of people's social networks. Research shows that our approach keeps people out of prison, reduces drug use, and improves the overall well-being of families living in poverty."²⁶ A 2002 research study by the Vera Institute of Justice found that substance use (illegal drugs, methadone, alcohol to intoxication, abuse of amphetamines, sedatives or barbiturates) among participants in La Bodega de la Familia declined by 80% to 42% over six months, compared with only a 7% decline among comparison group members over the same time period. Illegal drug use (heroin, cocaine, crack, marijuana and hallucinogens) declined by 47.5% over six months, compared with a 21% decline among comparison group members over the same time period. Those participating in La Bodega de la Familia program were also "less likely to be arrested and convicted of a new offense" based on data collected from comparison groups.²⁷

D. Educational Partnerships

Another collaborative effort arose not long ago when North Carolina's Department of Corrections formed a partnership with the state's Community College System to provide postsecondary correctional education to 78 prisons in North Carolina, reaching one-third of the state's inmates.²⁸ The educational and vocational resources are tailored for each prison. Many inmates take classes, either full time or part time. The real value of inmate education, however, is lower recidivism rates.

Boston University and the faith-based nonprofit organization, Partakers, based in Massachusetts is another public-private partnership example. The Boston University Prison Education Program enables prisoners to earn a bachelor of liberal studies in interdisciplinary studies. Partakers enlists local religious organizations to support individual prisoners who hope to qualify for the Boston University Prison Education Program and its volunteers provide support through visits and encouraging letters. Boston University funds the program, donating the cost of faculty, books and materials. Through their collaboration, these organizations are able to provide prisoners with support, practical resources and technical education.

Another example of a public-private collaboration reducing recidivism comes from Sing Sing, the infamous maximum security prison in Ossining, New York. The New York Theological Seminary (NYTS) began offering degree programs at Sing Sing in the early 1980s and in 1997 the Center for Social Research found that "only 9 percent of graduates of the New York Theological Seminary masters program were re-arrested within 28 months, compared to 37 percent of people who did not go through the program."²⁹ In 1994, in an effort to get-tough-on-crime, the U.S. Congress abolished Pell grants for prisoners, effectively ending chances for inmates to get a college education while behind bars. Struggling prisons such as Sing Sing reached out to the nonprofit community to fill the void, and in 2000 the nonprofit Hudson Link began offering higher education opportunities at the prison through private funding. Today Hudson Link partners with Mercy College, Vassar College and Nyack College to provide

26. Letter from Carol Shapiro, President, Fam. Just. available at <http://www.usmayors.org/76thannualmeeting/documents/fj-identity.pdf>

27. Eileen Sullivan et al., *Family as a Resource in Recovery from Drug Abuse*, 2002 VERA INST. OF JUST. 56, available at <http://www.vera.org/download?file=115/Families%2Bas%2Ba%2Bresource.pdf>.

28. Jeanne Contardo & Michelle Tolbert, *Prison Postsecondary Education: Bridging Learning from Incarceration to the Community*, 2008 PRISONER REENTRY INST. 7, available at http://www.jjay.cuny.edu/ContardoTolbert_Paper.pdf.

29. Mary Beth Pfeiffer, *Inmate College Programs Now Rare*, POUGHKEEPSIE J., Nov. 17, 2000, <http://www.poughkeepsiejournal.com/projects/prison/po111700s1.shtml>.

education to the inmates. A total of 197 students have graduated to date³⁰ and most enjoy healthy social and family lives, low rates of recidivism, and gainful employment.

E. Ready4Work

Ready4Work is a pilot program launched in 2003 to address the employment needs of ex-prisoners through faith-based and community-based organizations.³¹ Funded by U.S. Departments of Labor and Justice and the Annie E. Casey and Ford foundations, this national demonstration project was implemented in seventeen sites. The programs were developed to help local community- and faith-based organizations support the reentry and reintegration of ex-prisoners. Results after three years were promising: 4,482 former prisoners had been enrolled, with 86% receiving employment services and 63% receiving mentoring services.³² Public/Private Ventures, an action-based research, public policy, and program development organization, that oversaw the Ready4Work project, reported that only 2.5% of Ready4Work participants were reincarcerated within six months and that only 6.9% had been reincarcerated at the one-year mark.³³ One recent evaluation of the program stated that “Ready4Work gives us an important preliminary snapshot of what is possible when an intermediary brings together public and private entities to address prisoner reentry in a comprehensive and coordinated strategy. These results . . . support the notion that a comprehensive prisoner reentry plan is possible and that it can be accomplished without a massive expansion of the existing criminal justice system.”³⁴ Lessons learned from Ready4Work’s employment and life coaching (mentoring) components were published in manuals and distributed to cities, city task forces, and selected organizations to provide technical assistance to organizations such as Maryland Opportunity Public Safety Compact, the Newark Reentry Initiative, and the Community Reentry Initiative for Baltimore Empowerment Zone Residents.

F. Second Chance Act

One sign that congressional policymakers have recognized the benefits of partnering with nonprofits and community-based agencies is the passage of the Second Chance Act, which passed with overwhelming bipartisan support and was signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2008. The Act opened the door to government grants intended to foster a partnership between corrections and community-based organizations. Second Chance Act funding to date includes billions of dollars made available through the federal government to state and local governments, law enforcement, and non-profit agencies.³⁶ The legislation establishes several grant competitions for state and local governments to improve their planning process for inmates about to be released. One important feature of these grants is the opportunity for states to include in their plans community organizations that provide housing, job training, health and drug treatment and mentoring.

30. What’s New, HUDSON LINK FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN PRISON, http://www.hudsonlink.org/joomla/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=51&Itemid=65 (last visited October 28, 2010).

31. Byron K. Johnson, *The Faith Factor and Prison Reentry*, INTERDISC. J. RES. ON RELIGION, no. 4, 2008 at 10. I

32. *Id.*

33. *Id.* at 11.

34. *Id.* at 12.

35. Council of State Governments, Second Chance Act, REENTRY POL’Y COUNCIL, http://reentrypolicy.org/government_affairs/second_chance_act (last visited October 28, 2010).

G. Common Ground for Progress

Whatever one's political ideology, each of us should lament the loss of liberty and freedom that has resulted from one out of thirty-one adults being under direct or indirect government correctional supervision. History teaches us that public safety can not only be used to advance a truly healthy public square, but is often the ruse to successfully deprive a society of its natural right to liberty and freedom.

Whether liberal or conservative, each of us believes in the capacity of humans to undergo redemptive change and personal transformation. This is the common ground upon which we all can stand. I have no romantic view of prisoners and no naïve view of human transformation. As a criminal defense attorney and as Attorney General of Virginia, I saw too much. There are many in prisons that need to be there for their entire life and some who even need to be segregated from fellow prisoners. But I also have been in too many prisons to ignore the profound and lasting transformations I have seen, nor can I ignore the many prisoners who desire to change, but cannot do so on their own.

By cooperating with nonprofit groups and the faith community, prisons can exponentially multiply their own efforts to change prisoners' lives. Such non-governmental groups have a great advantage: They connect the inmates with caring and well trained people from the community. These mentors provide inmates with good role models and healthy relationships that will help them make the difficult transition from prison to freedom.

This is our common ground. This is our chance to advance public safety, reduce recidivism, steward tax dollars wisely, and reverse America's misguided romance with mass incarceration.