



**TESTIMONY OF
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BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON
CRIME, TERRORISM, AND HOMELAND SECURITY
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
HEARING ON THE SECOND CHANCE ACT OF 2007
TUESDAY, MARCH 20, 2007**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, my name is Steve Lufburrow, and I am the President and CEO of Goodwill Industries of Houston. I am pleased to testify today in support of the Second Chance Act.

The need to help the hundreds of thousands of incarcerated individuals in this country reintegrate into society has reached epidemic proportions. The critical underlying factor in any reintegration plan for the community is public safety.

The Second Chance Act would lead our nation in the right direction through the integration of four major areas: drug treatment and mental health, job training, mentoring, and family strengthening. Inmates exiting the nation's jails and prisons need all of these vital services.

Goodwill Industries is a network of 186 community-based, independent member organizations in the United States, Canada, and 15 other countries. Each organization serves people with disabilities, low-wage workers and other job seekers by providing education and career services, as well as job placement opportunities and post-employment support.

Our goal is to help people overcome barriers to employment and become independent, tax-paying members of their communities. In 2005, more than 846,000 people benefited from Goodwill's career services. Goodwill Industries reported \$2.65 billion in revenues, and channels 83 percent of its revenues directly into its programs and services.

Goodwill Industries has unique experience as a service provider in areas impacting prisoner re-entry. Even before the reintegration problem reached epidemic proportions, local Goodwill agencies throughout the country have been working with this population in both jails and prisons and when inmates are released. Since our agencies are community-based, we are able to work directly with probation officers, the courts, jails, prisons, and other partners in the community.

In 2005, 97 local Goodwill agencies helped more than 45,000 current and former prisoners. The challenges in helping this population are tremendous, and legislation such as the Second Chance Act recognizes the need for comprehensive and integrated services.

According to the Thurgood Marshall School of Law in Texas, between one-third and one-half of all ex-offenders are caught committing new crimes within three years of their release. But a 2004 study by the Urban Institute showed that inmates who are involved in work programs while incarcerated are approximately 20 percent less likely to re-offend upon release. By conducting pre-release assessments to evaluate educational and vocational needs and facilitating collaboration with nonprofits and other groups to promote employment, including transitional jobs and time-limited subsidized work experience, the Second Chance Act would significantly aid in increasing ex-offender employment opportunities.

In the state of Texas, we have 19 local Goodwill agencies. Our clients are primarily those with the most severe barriers to obtaining employment, such as individuals with disabilities and welfare recipients. However, more individuals who seek our services have some prior criminal background. We believe this is due to the growing rate of incarceration in this country.

For example, of the 26,043 persons served by San Antonio Goodwill last year, 10,945 were ex-offenders. That's nearly half of their entire client population. Out of all of our agencies in Texas, 14,308 offenders/ex-offenders were served. This is startling.

There exists a lack of comprehensive and coordinated services for ex-offenders from local, state, and federal authorities. With nearly 650,000 individuals released from jails and prison each year, we are reaching a national crisis in serving this group and helping them to reintegrate into society. We believe that passage of the Second Chance Act is a step in the right direction and long overdue. We support the integration of the workforce development system with housing, health services, education, mental health, and drug and alcohol treatment. Because of this crisis, many of our local agencies across the country are beginning prisoner re-entry programs.

We are pleased that the legislation includes a role for nonprofit service providers. The Second Chance Act would support the development of healthy child-parent relationships through implementing programs in correctional agencies to include the collection of information regarding any dependent children.

According to the Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons, the most accurate indicator of a

successful return to society is the inmate's connection to family. Children of incarcerated parents are six times more likely than other youth to land in prison at some point in their own lives. Over 1.5 million children have at least one parent in prison.

Goodwill agencies understand that reconnecting to one's family can be immensely effective in ending the cycle of recidivism. Through an ongoing partnership with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, local Goodwill agencies across the U.S. assist in supporting strong family relationships.

For years, our nationwide network has been providing juvenile and adult services to ex-offenders. Some of our programs receive state or foundation support. The Second Chance Act would provide support for family strengthening programs like the one we operate at Goodwill Industries.

Funding for prisoner re-entry is critical and often lacking for nonprofits. At Goodwill Industries, we support many of our programs through the revenue provided by sales of donated clothing and household goods in our retail stores. Currently, adequate funding does not exist for prisoner re-entry programs. Much of the funding in the corrections system is spent on housing inmates, and not on comprehensive services that would actually help prepare them for release and ultimately lead to a decrease in the nation's recidivism rate. The Second Chance Act would help reduce recidivism by allocating the necessary funds to support those comprehensive services that have been identified as reducing recidivism.

The legislation would also help reduce state corrections' costs. A significant portion of state budgets are dedicated to correction-related expenses. The average cost to house a federal inmate is over \$25,000 a year. The average cost on the state level in 2000 was only slightly less --\$21,170 yearly. While the costs to taxpayers soared from \$9 billion per year on corrections in 1982 to \$60 billion two decades later, recidivism has not improved over the last 30 years. Given the current cost spent on corrections, even a modest reduction in the rate of recidivism would yield substantial economic benefits.

Many of the clients served by local Goodwill agencies have some type of criminal background on their records, and some estimates indicate as many as 30-50 percent of the individuals served by local Goodwill agencies have a prior conviction. As a human service organization, Goodwill Industries understands that for ex-offenders to re-enter society, they must have the following:

- Safe housing
- Substance abuse treatment
- Services for physical and mental illness
- Training, education, and jobs
- Occupational skills training
- Job retention services

Many of our agencies are involved in providing such services, which we believe are critical in reducing the nation's rate of recidivism. We have two local agencies -- Goodwill Industries of New York and New Jersey and Goodwill Industries of San Antonio -- that received the Prisoner Reentry Initiative grant from the U.S. Department of Labor. We support the expansion of this program and the authorization of new funding for job training programs operated by nonprofits.

Goodwill Industries of San Antonio leads a collaboration of faith and community-based providers in an efficient, seamless service continuum for non-violent offenders. The agency's "Learn While You Earn" project features transitional employment, job retention support and continuous case management, in addition to job placement, housing assistance, counseling, and alcohol and drug treatment. In each of these service areas, the agency partners with other providers.

Goodwill Industries of New York and New Jersey began Project Caring Community in 2003 to help female ex-offenders successfully transition to community life after their release from prison. This agency provides wrap around case management services and medical assistance. The program also provides counseling by trained psychologists to deal with psychiatric, substance abuse, housing, education, social, personal and family related issues. This program serves women at several women's prisons in upstate New York. I have included for the record a more extensive list of our programs and services.

Our local agencies specialize in vocational screening, pre-employment and soft skills training, transitional work experience, placement and retention services. The successful reintegration of individuals coming out of our nation's prisons depends upon community and family support, and placement into employment -- this ultimately will help us to reach our goal of improving public safety.

We believe that the Second Chance Act is urgently needed. Until the necessary steps are taken to help former prisoners obtain and retain jobs, the downward spiral of recidivism will continue. By keeping former prisoners from returning to a life of crime and being incarcerated, we increase public safety and reduce corrections' costs. The Second Chance furthers us toward these goals.

Thank you.