



United States Virgin Islands

Bureau of Corrections

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COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY, JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Presented for :
Testimony on Bill 35-0115

Presented by :
Director Wynnie Testamark

**Testimony of Wynn Timer Testamark, Director
Virgin Islands Bureau of Corrections
Committee on Homeland Security, Justice, and Public Safety
35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands
March 12, 2024**

Good Morning, Chairman Kenneth L. Gittens, esteemed Members of the Committee on Homeland Security, Justice, and Public Safety, and distinguished Members of the 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands, as well as our attentive listening and viewing audience. I am Wynn Timer Testamark, serving as the Director of the Virgin Islands Bureau of Corrections (referred to as the "Bureau" or "BOC"). I express sincere gratitude for the opportunity to present testimony regarding Bill Number 35-0115.

The Bureau wholeheartedly supports the intent of this bill for several compelling reasons. As a correctional institution entrusted with the care of individuals within our jurisdiction, our mission aligns closely with Governor Albert Bryan Jr.'s priorities of ensuring proper care and supervision of offenders while facilitating their re-entry into society. We have witnessed firsthand the transformative impact that fair hiring practices can have on individuals and communities alike. Central to the notion of a just society is the belief in redemption and the opportunity for individuals to rebuild their lives post-incarceration. Employment serves as a crucial pillar in successful reintegration, offering stability, purpose, and a pathway to self-sufficiency. The Fair Chance for Employment Act embodies this belief, ensuring that individuals with past convictions are not unjustly excluded from job opportunities due to the stigma associated with their criminal history. By postponing inquiries into criminal history until later in the hiring process, employers can evaluate candidates based on qualifications, skills, and merits, rather than being biased by their past mistakes. Research consistently

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demonstrates that gainful employment is pivotal in reducing recidivism rates, thus fostering safer communities and a more inclusive society. A recent study published by the International Journal of Social Science and Human Research in 2023 titled “The Reintegration of Ex-Convicts in Society: A Case Study” found that individuals who secure employment post-release are less likely to re-offend, contributing positively to public safety and societal well-being. Also, a study published by ScholarWorks in 2020 titled “Exploring the Challenges of Re-Entry Among Female Offenders” revealed that employment significantly reduces the likelihood of female ex-offenders returning to criminal behavior. Moreover, the Fair Chance for Employment Act aligns seamlessly with the Bureau's Re-Entry program and our overarching five-year Strategic Plan. Through initiatives such as expanding educational opportunities, implementing vocational training programs, and fostering partnerships with local organizations, we aim to equip individuals with the tools necessary for successful reintegration into society.

We are proud to highlight success stories within our organization, such as the recent hiring of a Maintenance Technician who demonstrated remarkable dedication and commitment to positive change during his incarceration. His story exemplifies the potential for redemption and underscores the importance of providing second chances. Additionally, I am pleased to share that we have hired a Transition Case Management Specialist who plays a pivotal role in our Re-Entry program, providing personalized support and guidance to individuals as they navigate the transition from incarceration to community integration.

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Through individualized case management, our specialist assists in accessing essential services, securing employment opportunities, and fostering a stable and successful transition back into society. Meanwhile, the Case Management Planner works diligently to prepare inmates for successful reintegration by developing comprehensive case management plans tailored to their needs and goals.

In endorsing this legislation, the Bureau reaffirms its commitment to fostering a society that values rehabilitation, forgiveness, and the belief in the potential for positive change in every individual. I urge the Committee to recognize the profound impact the Fair Chance for Employment Act can have on the lives of countless individuals striving for redemption and a chance to rebuild their lives. Regarding the creation and implementation of hiring policies for individuals with previous incarceration history, we defer to the Government of the Virgin Islands Division of Personnel and the Virgin Islands Department of Labor for their expertise and experience in this area.

Chairman Gittens, I extend my sincere appreciation for the opportunity to address the Committee today. I stand prepared to address any questions or concerns you may have. Thank you.