

For Immediate Release
January 26, 2016

Contact:
Louis Sawyer 202-903-9065
louissawyerjr@yahoo.com
Tara Libert 202.251.0343
Tara@freemindsbookclub.org

Colson Task Force Recommendations Fail to Address Urgent Requests of DC Advocates Report Ignores DC Inmates' Unique Challenges

(Washington, DC) -- Today, DC community members, advocates and Returning Citizens are distressed that the Colson Task Force's report, "Transforming Prisons, Restoring Lives: Final Recommendations on Federal Corrections" failed to include urgent pleas from the DC residents. The report failed to acknowledge that DC inmates are uniquely impacted by the federal correction system's policies and practices as the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) serves as Washington, DC's prison system. The report did not include recommendations from DC residents, including recommendations from the DC Reentry Task Force to overcome the undue burdens and challenges DC residents face, especially the appointment of a "Director of DC Corrections" position to act as a liaison between the Bureau of Prisons and the DC Community.

"We call on Members of Congress to include our recommendations in any criminal justice reform measures to improve conditions for DC inmates and show the nation's home that it's own citizens matter," said Louis Sawyer, Chair, DC Reentry Task Force.

"The challenges faced by DC inmates, who make up approximately 5,000 inmates of the Bureau of Prisons population, are left out of this report," said Tara Libert, Executive Director of Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop, a DC-based non-profit organization providing reentry services to DC inmates and a member of the Reentry Task Force. "Our residents are subject to extreme hardships having the federal system serve as our city's prison system and there needs to be more oversight and connection to city leaders, advocates and reentry service providers."

In a letter issued to the task force in July, 2015, and reiterated in a meeting with the Urban Institute staff for the Colson Taskforce, the DC Reentry Task Force proposed the following recommendations, none of which were included in the final report:

- Appoint a "Director of DC Corrections" position at the BOP to act as a liaison between the BOP and the DC community. This single point of contact would create accountability and reduce the "hot potato" situation DC faces now, with different BOP officials redirecting responsibility without ever solving problems.
- Review conditions at USP Lewisburg where staff assaults are common and mental health treatment is inadequate. If conditions cannot be improved close the facility.
- Create an effective Reentry program by bringing all DC inmates back to a DC facility who are within 180 days of release.
- Recognition that existing contracts for halfway houses/residential reentry centers in DC are not providing returning citizens with high quality services that will help them successfully reenter the District from BOP facilities. Contract for - or develop BOP-run facilities a high quality Halfway House for DC inmates. Current halfway house provider Hope Village should be barred from obtaining new contract.

- End solitary confinement for vulnerable populations- mentally ill, youth under 25 and pregnant women.

Conditions for DC inmates in BOP's facility in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania were exposed in a report by the DC Corrections Information Council (CIC), which is an independent monitoring body mandated by the US Congress and the DC Council to inspect, monitor, and report on the conditions of confinement at facilities where DC residents are incarcerated. The report is available online at: [http://cic.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cic/publication/attachments/Final USP Lewisburg Report 11.5.15.pdf](http://cic.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cic/publication/attachments/Final_USP_Lewisburg_Report_11.5.15.pdf). (The inadequacy of the BOP-contracted halfway house "Hope Village" were similarly documented in a 2013 report by the CIC.)

"There was no mention of improved mental health treatment for people in BOP facilities and it is desperately needed. Our DC residents are receiving inadequate care for serious mental health issues at USP Lewisburg, according to Deborah Golden, DC Prisoners Project, Washington Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs. "The report needs to address this and urge Congress to focus specifically on this issue."

The Taskforce has been, and will continue to, work with BOP and DC leaders and DC Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton to address the problems the District faces in dealing with all of the problems resulting from the Revitalization Act of 1997. These include not only corrections and reentry, but also the fact that DC code offenders have no meaningful path to clemency or parole.

The DC Reentry Task Force is a voluntary group whose mission is to promote policies and practices that have positive impacts on DC's returning citizens. The Reentry Task Force includes returning citizens, service providers, advocacy organizations, policy experts, faith leaders and other individuals concerned with improving the lives of those impacted by the DC justice system. We are passionate by a belief that improving the reentry process is critical to both our returning citizens and to the health and safety of the wider community.

#

The final copy of the report can be found here: <http://colsontaskforce.org/final-recommendations/Colson-Task-Force-Final-Recommendations-January-2016.pdf>