Man, let's talk about racism, racial equity and true reform for our returning citizens.

97% of the DC jail population is black, 92% black male. 36% have not committed a crime. They are there awaiting revocation hearings. Why do we over incarcerate black people? DC's overall population is 702,500; 47% black and 41% white. Are we saying that white people don't commit crime? DC is a racist city and blacks are paying for the city's sins. Our neighborhoods are being gentrified and black people are being pushed out of the city with lower paying jobs and higher rental fees. We have black people telling black people "NO" that they can't have a halfway house in the neighborhood they were born and raised in. You don't want us to have a halfway house, but it's okay for us to be violence interrupters and cure violence in these same neighborhoods. We have 5100 prisoners in 112 different institutions throughout the country and we have homeless black kids going to school everyday from a shelter, 40% literacy rate among black kids who make up the school to prison pipeline. We can't vote and we are underemployed, but yet we are still talking, having town halls, roundtable discussions, listening sessions and the like. This city has a $15.4 billion dollar budget.

It's easier to apologize than to get permission.
"Finding a job is hard when you have a criminal background, I just want to give up"

DISCUSSION ABOUT EMPLOYMENT FOR RETURNING CITIZENS, WITH DONI CRAWFORD

Q. How do we strategize the process of obtaining equity in DC for Returning Citizens? What has been your observation?

A. We need to take a holistic policy approach to obtain equity for returning citizens. Policymakers and advocates should look at the ways in which housing, employment, entrepreneurship, education, etc. are all interconnected, and how they can either advance or stifle equity for returning citizens. I manage the affordable housing and workforce development portfolios at my organization, and I’ve taken an interest in researching policy solutions specifically for returning citizens in those two areas. While I’ve always been interested in studying the divestment of Black communities and the long-lasting harmful effects of gentrification, it wasn’t until I met with a new partner that I began to think about how gentrification especially affects returning citizens. So, being intentional about establishing new relationships has been beneficial to me and my work. I’ve also learned firsthand that it’s extremely important that we all pay attention to the budget process in DC and hold our elected policymakers accountable to investing in our returning citizen community. Fully funding the Mayor’s Office on Returning Citizens Affairs and investing in housing vouchers for returning citizens can build economic opportunity and ensure every returning citizen is able to fully participate in the DC community. The Mayor or a Councilmember can say that they support the returning citizen community, but are they actually investing in them in DC’s budget each year?

Q. What potential economic opportunities in DC do you believe Returning Citizens should, or should not be a part of?

A. Entrepreneurship in the cannabis industry, which is an opportunity to advance restorative justice and build Black and brown wealth. Last year, I read two pieces of legislation intended to legalize the sale of recreational cannabis and establish a tax and regulatory system for it in DC. It was immediately apparent to me that both bills could do more to address the historic harm that the fictitious War on Drugs caused Black and brown communities. Unfortunately, the barriers that returning citizens face in many areas from housing to employment is present within the cannabis industry. A lot of cities and states have placed restrictions on cannabis dispensary ownership and employment for people convicted of past felony drug offenses or serious violent crime, and proposed legislation in DC is no different. This contributes to the statistic that nationwide, Black ownership of storefront cannabis dispensaries is estimated to be around just one percent.

Although Congress has prohibited DC from passing legislation anytime soon to legalize, tax and regulate the sale of recreational cannabis, the District has the responsibility to learn from other states successes and failures and ensure that future access to the new industry is equitable – particularly for people who have cannabis-related convictions.

A. Many believe that Returning Citizens should continue to be punished from the job market for extensive periods of time - what are your thoughts on this matter?

Q. Our criminal justice system is an unjust system that frequently punishes people for having low incomes and is based on retribution, not restoration. And many, many people – especially Black people – are unjustly targeted and over-policied, convicted, over-sentenced and wrongly imprisoned. Returning citizens have served their time and should not continue to be punished upon release.

Q. Have you ever worked with anyone that is a Returning Citizen? If so, how was your experience with that person?

I don’t know if I have ever had a colleague who was a returning citizen. I have begun to build partnerships with returning citizens in my current position, and I appreciate the “lived experience” and passion that they bring to the work. I have learned a lot from them about the criminal injustice system and the barriers that they face every day because of past convictions. - continue to page 3
REACHING THE BOILING POINT!

In an article on The Atlantic’s website, entitled “What We Don’t Mention About Unemployment” it states, the National Employment Law Project, one out of every four adult Americans has a criminal record, a broad term covering everything from violent crime to arrest without a conviction. But for most employers, the devil isn’t in the details—simply having a criminal record can often be enough to have your resume dismissed by employers, leaving you without options to earn a stable income. The result is that a significant chunk of working-age adults, particularly communities of color, are barred—by law or stigma—from contributing to the economy.” “We are talking about a large number of people who were never even incarcerated— they received a sentence of probation or had a mere arrest,” says Gretchen Slusser, executive director of Cabrini Green Legal Aid, a Chicago-based organization that provides free legal assistance for people with criminal records.” The article continues to state, “These are people who have actually never left society, but suffer the same consequences as someone who was in prison for 20 years.” According to the American Bar Association, there are 58,000 collateral consequences that accompany a criminal record. Work in certain sectors, like education and healthcare, is often off limits. Most public housing forbids residency for anyone with a criminal record.” The District of Columbia should take notes from Chicago, with CGLA (Cabrini Green Legal Aid) who is making real changes with criminal records relief. The article continues to state, “In Chicago, CGLA has led the charge as the city’s only major provider of criminal records relief—a process that’s proven to be the only way to hurdle barriers standing in the way of employment. On the ground, a volunteer workforce of lawyers provides free legal assistance to people with criminal records. With their expertise, people can expunge non-convictions from their records, seal certain conviction records from employers, or earn certificates of good conduct as legal proof that a conviction isn’t an indictment of poor character.” They want something to come off their record because they can’t get a job or they’re underemployed,” says Mary Jo Quinn, assistant general counsel at Allstate, a regular volunteer and member of the advisory board at CGLA. “Every person that I talk to, made me realize that they were not folks looking for a handout. – continue to page 4

Discussion with Doni Crawford - Cont’d

Q. - What would you say to employers in DC to encourage hiring Returning Citizens?

A. – Hire them! Employers should intentionally broaden the pool of candidates they see, not just those who have passed a criminal background check. This means considering people who have completed a rehabilitation program and have demonstrated their commitment to returning to their communities. It also means being open to people who have a record, but who have taken steps to turn their lives around.

We spotlight Micheal Jones today, for his unwavering commitment to the cause!

Mr. Jones was released in 2019 from the Federal Bureau of Prisons with hopes to strive for a new way of life. He was introduced to The National Reentry Network for Returning Citizens by way of our Ready4Work Job Readiness Cohorts. Mr. Jones participated in our 4th Ready4Work Cohort with purpose, and a desire to be gainfully employed. While participating in the program, he often found time to devote to outreach campaigns, which helped him develop a positive presence in the community. Mr. Jones attends our Community Focus Group meetings, participated in our video testimonials, participates in our mentoring program, testified in front of the DC Council for new legislation impacting Returning Citizens, and volunteers for some of our outreach initiatives! He is a shining example of a 180 degree change! As as result of his commitment, he is working full-time as Driver for Yerbamates, as of December 2019.

“Organization has helped me realize determination brings results. There are individuals that care and will help you help yourself. Put the work in and see the result, progress.”

We are very proud of the strides Mr. Jones has made, and look forward to his continued growth.
Reaching the Boiling Point
- Cont'd

Every person wants a job. And the reason they want a job is to make their life and their family's lives better. "It just killed me that one mistake was haunting somebody for so long. So it was the second chance opportunity that drew me into it." Through this work over the years, CGLA’s gathered reams of data that have helped influence the state to pass laws to require companies to see people as people, rather than simply see the criminal record. Thanks in part to their providing the government with data, Illinois expanded sealing of records to seven more felonies last year. "The data is the key to all of it," says Gretchen Slussers, CGLA's director. "Because we can tell stories until we're blue in the face [...] but when you're actually able to say, 'Listen, this is the data on 25,000 people that we’ve seen in the last 5 years,' you can’t ignore that. Lastly, the article states, "Meanwhile, CGLA has also engaged Chicago's business community to look beyond what's required by law. Through a partnership with Morgan Lewis, an international management law firm that represents employers, among other legal services, to major corporations, they've been able to make the business case for looking past the criminal record, Slusser says. "When folks like Allstate step up and say, 'Hey this is crazy, we want to be part of the solution,' all of a sudden all the people who weren't listening to you before start listening to you."

A HAND UP!

In the article, "Nowhere to Go: Homelessness among formerly incarcerated people" by the Prison Policy Initiative website by Lucius Couloute August 2018 it states, "People who have been to prison just once experience homelessness at a rate nearly 7 times higher than the general public. But people who have been incarcerated more than once have rates 13 times higher than the general public. In other words, people who have been incarcerated multiple times are twice as likely to be homeless as those who are returning from their first prison term. Unfortunately, being homeless makes formerly incarcerated people more likely to be arrested and incarcerated again, thanks to policies that criminalize homelessness. As law enforcement agencies aggressively enforce "offenses" such as sleeping in public spaces, panhandling, and public urination - not to mention other low-level offenses that are more visible when committed in public - formerly incarcerated people are unnecessarily funneled back through the "revolving door." Black women experienced the highest rate of sheltered homelessness - nearly four times the rate of white men, and twice as high as the rate of Black men. Combined with our breakdowns of race and gender separately (see Figure 1), this analysis shows that Black women face severe barriers to housing after release. Black women experienced the highest rate of sheltered homelessness - nearly four times the rate of white men, and twice as high as the rate of Black men. Combined with our breakdowns of race and gender separately (see Figure 1), this analysis shows that Black women face severe barriers to housing after release."

- continue to page 5
Program and Services

The Ready4Work Job Readiness Cohort is a comprehensive 4-week Job Readiness/Job Placement Program. It is held on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 10AM – 4PM. The 5th Cohort will be held January 6, 2020 through February 3, 2020. The program provides each participant with a $9.50/hr training wage.

The National Reentry Network for Returning Citizens Ready4Work Job Readiness Cohorts offers clients a different perspective of how they view employment. The comprehensive learning environment, provides pertinent information to clients from a holistic approach. The training dives into a deeper way of thinking, such as emotional intelligence, appropriate workplace behavior, cognitive behavior modification techniques, time-management, self-awareness, trauma informed care, conflict resolution/mediation, communication styles, hard and soft skills, self-advocacy, thinking traps, self-regulation, work values, identification of strengths and weaknesses, etc. One goal is to look internally to find out why we make certain decisions that lead to termination of employment, or not getting hired for permanent employment.

The National Reentry Network for Returning Citizens Peer2Peer Mentoring program is providing a comprehensive mentoring approach. Our mentoring program is a formal relationship with mutually agreed-upon goals defined by both parties. Through Peer2Peer mentoring relationships, we guide the Returning Citizen toward stability, a change in behavior, and a change in thinking. The Returning Citizen (the mentee), defines their direction and goals while the mentor guides the mentee through their reintegration into the community.

A HANDUP - CONT'D

As a response to the housing crisis affecting Returning Citizens in the District of Columbia, The Fair Budget Coalition has drafted recommendations to the Mayor and DC Council to request 500 additional housing units for Returning Citizens. D.C. residents are encourage to vote on this matter in support of this request by January 25, 2020. The National Reentry Network for Returning Citizens position on this critical issue is to seek successful transitioning for our brothers and sisters returning back to the DC communities. We believe that they should be able to secure a good job and affordable housing in the same communities in which they left by way of incarceration.
Inspire & Empower
Professional Clothing Drive!!

We are accepting clothing donations today!

Drop off location:

3227 Dubois Place, SE Washington, DC 20019
The hunt is on!

GET READY TO HELP CHANGE A LIFE!

What we are in need of:
- Women's blouses
- Suits/Suit Jackets
  - Dress Slacks
  - Dresses
  - Skirts
- Dress Shoes
- Men's plain collar shirts
  - Suits/Suit Jackets
  - Neck Ties
  - Dress Slacks
  - Dress Shoes

We are asking for clothing that are new or used, clean, free of holes, and stains. All sizes are welcome!

Donations can made at 3227 Dubois Place, SE Washington DC 20019 between 9am to 5pm.
Please call 202-584-1000 before drop off of items.