

Testimony of Calvin Moore
Wednesday, June 9, 2010

Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security
Hearing on Collateral Consequences of Criminal Convictions
Barriers to Reentry for the Formerly Incarcerated

Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today about the collateral consequences of criminal convictions. My name is Calvin Moore, and I would like to share my story about how my criminal record has been a barrier to rebuilding my life and finding meaningful employment.

I am 59 years old, and grew up in the District of Columbia in the 1950's and 1960s. The District was a very different place than it is today. I lived in a primarily segregated neighborhood near the Navy Yard where racism and racial profiling were rampant and there weren't a lot of opportunities for young people. I was part of a pretty tough neighborhood crowd and, unfortunately, got into some trouble with the law. I was young and made some bad decisions. But I paid for them. I was convicted and served a 10 year sentence: 3 ½ years in prison, and the remaining 6 ½ years on parole. While incarcerated, I tried to start over. I took college courses, and I got married. When I was released, it was very difficult. I didn't have a strong support system and I didn't have a lot of opportunities. Unfortunately, I got into some problems with drugs. In the late 1980s, I again found myself face-to-face with the criminal system.

Since this time, however, I have been working to rebuild my life and start over. I have been totally clean, and have not had any problems with the law. I found various jobs, some with private companies laying asphalt and performing other manual labor, and even a position with the DC government as a professional driver. These jobs, however, did not pay well and did not provide any benefits, such as health care or sick leave. Over the years, I also started developing some serious health problems from my previous jobs which prevented me from working full-time. I am currently receiving SSDI.

Since October 2007, I have been out of work, diligently looking for any job to help me pay the bills and make ends meet. When the recession hit, finding long-term employment became that much harder. I applied for over 42 jobs, but was turned down by all of them. The reason was that my criminal record prevented me from being hired. In short, the decisions that I made 30 plus years ago – and that I have already paid for – are still preventing me from moving forward and getting a second chance.

I went to the D.C. Employment Justice Center last year about the possibility of sealing my criminal record under the District's 2006 Expungement and Sealing law so that I could have a better chance at finding a job with decent wages. Unfortunately, because the law is so narrowly drafted, I was not able to seal any part of my record. My criminal record will forever be an impediment for me, even though I am a different person today than I was back then. I want to be able to help others who are also in similar situations as myself. I recently joined a workers' advocacy group as part of the Employment Justice Center so I can advocate for changes in the law and help remove barriers for people who have criminal records.

There is some good news. I recently met with Catholic Charities and am in the process of returning to school to become a Certified Addiction Counselor. I am hoping that after I become certified, I will be able to find another job and help others with addiction problems.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share my story about the barriers that many individuals with criminal records face when they try to rebuild their lives after their convictions. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.