



July 19, 2019

The Hon. Karen Bass
Chair, Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security
Judiciary Committee
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Hon. John Ratcliffe
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security
Judiciary Committee
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Karen Bass, Ranking Member Ratcliffe:

As members of the Women Organizing Reentry Communities of Color - Proposition 47 network (WORCC-Prop 47) in follow-up to the July 13, 2019 Congressional Hearing in Los Angeles: *California Criminal Justice Reform, Potential Lessons for the Nation*, we respectfully offer the following lessons and observations from California's implementation of The Safe Neighborhoods and Schools Act (Prop 47), and its impact on re-entry efforts of formerly incarcerated women of color.

In November 2014, California voters passed the referendum known as Proposition 47, changing six low-level offenses from felonies to misdemeanors. Prop 47 saves the state millions of dollars in reduced incarceration. To-date, those savings amount to approximately \$199 million (bscc.ca.gov/news/board-awards-96m-in-prop-47-grants). Savings from the reclassifications are allocated to local prevention and treatment programs intended to support re-entry communities. The Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) is responsible for administering Prop 47 funds through a competitive grant program and is represented by many justice reform champions and allies. Proposition 47 requires that these funds be awarded to public agencies to provide mental health services, substance use disorder treatment and/or diversion programs for those in the criminal justice. The BSCC further requires that at least 50 percent of the award made to grantees is passed through to community-based service providers.

However, despite the historic nature and momentum generated by Prop 47, the promise of this important policy falls short for women of color struggling to reunite their families after incarceration.

Many of us are acutely aware of the trauma and stigma imposed and assigned to re-entry women when seeking employment, housing, child care and other basic needs. As primary custodians of our families, we require multiple pathways to generate income and achieve financial stability that takes into account the unique conditions of women inside and outside of incarceration. WORCC-Prop 47 promotes the inclusion of gender as a key factor in developing and implementing policy. Our stake in the ground is to achieve solutions that respond to women, particularly women of color and their unique re-entry challenges.

As the Subcommittee defines its policy platform, we invite you to consider the following insights from our ongoing work to ensure that existing policies such as Prop 47 benefits re-entry women of color:

- **Include gender at the onset of policy development.** We recommend that policy makers at all-levels enhance their knowledge and understanding of gender responsive practices by seeking input and perspectives of women with lived experiences. Policies developed in the absence of affected communities have limited shelf-life and utility.
- **Target resources for women of color to access employment and other streams of income.** Women often serve as the hub of their families and community inside and outside of incarceration. Creating access to financial stability and health is a key factor to build resilience, prevent recidivism, and prevent youth from the prison pipeline. Policy solutions that can directly impact the 60% of women in jail who did not have full-time employment prior to their arrest (*Vera-web/downloads/publication/Overlooked Women and Jails report web*) and 44% of women who neither graduated from high school nor received a GED (*Sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/1/Women in the Criminal Justice System Briefing Sheets*) will positively influence many other lives.
- **Build data systems and collection into policies to promote transparency and accountability and inform decision-making and use of resources.** Savings from the passing of Prop 47 represent real resources to prevent crime, and re-engage formerly incarcerated populations as contributors to our society. Our inquiries find that state and local criminal justice agencies including courts do not have a systematic consistent method for collecting or accessing data to show who by race and gender are receiving Prop 47 resentencing and reclassification. This data gap means policy makers don't have the appropriate tools to make informed decisions to ensure equitable use of available resources. We want women, particularly women of color, to be counted so they are not rendered invisible.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this letter. We seek to be a resource to members of the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security to ensure that formerly incarcerated women of color are counted, are successful in reuniting with their families, and are treated as active contributors to the health and well-being of communities. We hope that our findings about the gaps and opportunities and continued efforts to improve the implementation of Prop 47 in California will help to inform your thinking about the importance of gender in justice reform efforts nationally.

Sincerely,

WORCC-Prop 47 Collaborative Members

- A New Way of Life
- Time for Change Foundation
- Justice Now

Submitted on Behalf of WORCC-Prop 47 Collaborative by:

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