

FRENCH HILL
2ND DISTRICT, ARKANSAS



COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL SERVICES
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AND ILLICIT FINANCE

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

WASHINGTON, DC OFFICE
1229 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
PHONE: (202) 225-2506
FAX: (202) 225-5903

CONWAY DISTRICT OFFICE
1105 DEER STREET, SUITE 12
CONWAY, AR 72032
PHONE: (501) 358-3481
FAX: (501) 358-3494

LITTLE ROCK DISTRICT OFFICE
1501 NORTH UNIVERSITY AVENUE, SUITE 630
LITTLE ROCK, AR 72207
PHONE: (501) 324-5941
FAX: (501) 324-6029

April 16, 2018

The Honorable John Culberson
Chairman
Subcommittee for Commerce, Science,
Justice and related Agencies
House Appropriations Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
H-309 Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable José Serrano
Ranking Member
Subcommittee for Commerce, Science,
Justice and related Agencies
House Appropriations Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
H-309 Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Chairman Culberson and Ranking Member Serrano:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify this morning.

HBCUs and Recidivism

Today, in America, according to the Federal Bureau of Prisons, we spend an average of \$32,000 a year per inmate on a prison population that dwarfs that of the rest of the world.

Each year, more than 600,000 people leave our prisons, but three-quarters of them recidivate within five years. This is detrimental to American families, American communities, and to the American economy.

How do we hold offenders accountable for their actions without denying them a return as contributing members of society?

In Arkansas, Arkansas Baptist College has partnered with the Arkansas Department of Community Correction to provide an entrepreneurship program for prison inmates during the last six months of their sentence. The program serves as a transition phase for inmates to gain academic and spiritual development and encourages them to continue in their education at the school after their release.

Last year, I introduced legislation that would establish a pilot program at the U.S. Department of Justice to provide grants to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) to implement educational programs for eligible offenders and help them successfully transition back into their communities.

The average cost of attending an HBCU is around \$16,000 per year. We spend upwards of \$80 billion every year on warehousing inmates, when we could be saving valuable taxpayer funds. I believe that we must look at this as not only a matter of financial cost, but also as one of human cost.

That is why I urge your Committee to include the following language in its bill report to support the efforts of our HBCUs to address this critical need.

The Committee supports the U.S. Department of Justice's coordination and collaboration with Historically Black Colleges and Universities to provide educational programs for recently released and soon to be released criminal offenders to assist them in obtaining skills that will help them successfully transition back into their communities and reduce recidivism rates.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Mental Health

I would also like to discuss mental health and support for the Mentally Ill Offender Act.

Today, in America, a behavioral health epidemic has manifested in increased drug usage, rising suicide rates, and a nationwide life expectancy that has fallen for the second year in a row.

Too many times, Americans suffering from mental illness turn to self-medication using alcohol, prescription painkillers, and illegal substances. On average, opioid use kills 115 Americans a day. We must take strong steps to address this epidemic through comprehensive strategies and work to ensure that our state and local governments are equipped to care for non-violent offenders with mental health and substance abuse disorders.

I hope that you will give full and fair consideration to funding the Mentally Ill Offender Act, which provides grants to these overburdened state and local governments to support mental health courts, training to staff, and mental health and substance abuse treatment services with the purpose of better addressing the needs of non-violent offenders. By supporting these entities in addressing the substance abuse and mental health issue of non-violent offenders, we can lower the impact of the opioid epidemic and decrease recidivism.

Chairman John Culberson and Ranking Member José Serrano
April 16, 2018
Page 3 of 3

I appreciate your consideration of this request and thank you for the opportunity to testify to the committee today.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "French Hill". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "F".

French Hill
Member of Congress