

Testimony of Congressman Hakeem Jeffries (NY-08)

House Committee on Appropriations

Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies

March 26, 2019

Chairman Serrano, Ranking Member Aderholt and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on funding priorities for the Fiscal Year 2020 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies (CJS) Appropriations bill. I am here to request that the First Step Act receive the full funding amount authorized by law.

The First Step Act became law in December of last year after passing the House of Representatives and Senate with overwhelming bipartisan support. A key component of this important legislation was the authorization of \$75 million per year for the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) to expand and develop opportunities for incarcerated individuals to participate in programming and productive activities shown to reduce the risk of recidivism.¹ This programming will provide returning citizens with the necessary tools for a successful and lasting transition back into their communities. It will also make our federal prisons more effective places of rehabilitation and eventually less crowded and costly.

Today, there are more than 180,000 inmates in the federal prison system.² Almost every one of them will be released at some point in time. However, high rates of recidivism suggest that we can do better to prepare incarcerated individuals for reentry.

Research has shown that programming, like the kind authorized by the First Step Act, will reduce recidivism and save taxpayer dollars. According to a recent study, inmates who

¹ P.L. 115-391, Section 104(a).

² Federal Bureau of Prisons, *Population Statistics*, https://www.bop.gov/about/statistics/population_statistics.jsp.

participated in correctional education programs were 43 percent less likely to recidivate than inmates who did not.³ Congress passed the First Step Act to give individuals in BOP custody a better chance to return to a productive and law-abiding life. Funding for the law's implementation is critical to achieving this goal.

We have seen many examples of educational, vocational and faith-based programming making a real difference in the lives of incarcerated individuals. While BOP currently offers literacy classes, English as a Second Language, parenting classes, wellness education, adult continuing education and library services, demand far exceeds supply. One study found that 70 percent of incarcerated individuals wanted to take an education program in order to expand their knowledge or skills and to increase their chances of getting a job upon release, but only 21 percent were actually studying for a formal degree or certificate.⁴ Further, BOP has reported long waiting lists for work and educational programs. It is critical that we provide everyone who wants to participate the opportunity to do so.

While the expanded programming and associated earned time credits will lead to significant long-term cost savings and improved public safety, the First Step Act must be fully funded at \$75 million to make these benefits possible. This is an opportunity to make a transformational investment in the lives of incarcerated and formerly-incarcerated individuals, giving them the chance to be bigger than the mistakes that put them behind bars. Thank you for your time and consideration.

³ Lois M. Davis, Jennifer L. Steele, Robert Bozick, Malcolm V. Williams, Susan Turner, Jeremy N. V. Miles, Jessica Saunders, & Paul S. Steinberg, *How Effective Is Correctional Education, and Where Do We Go from Here?*, Rand Corporation, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR564.html.

⁴ Bobby D. Rampey, Shelley Keiper, Leyla Mohadjer, Tom Krenzke, Jianzhu Li, Nina Thornton, Jacquie Hogan, Holly Xie, & Stephen Provasnik, *Highlights from the U.S. PIAAC Survey of Incarcerated Adults: Their Skills, Work Experience, Education, and Training*, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2016/2016040.pdf>.