

**.. Testimony of Mr. John E. Harriel Jr., Diversity Manager/General Field Superintendent for  
Morrow Meadows Corporation/ 2ndCall Facilitator**

**Before Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security,  
House Judiciary Committee  
United States House of Representatives**

**“Challenges and Opportunities in Reentry Services or Returning Citizens”**

**Thursday, February 27, 2020**

Congresswoman Bass and Members of The House Judiciary Committee on Crime, I would like to express my sincere thank you, and for allowing me to testify today. I'm very humbled by the opportunity.

I wish I could go back and speak to my younger self and reassure that young boy that he would be okay. In fact, explain to him that one day he would be standing before Congresswoman Bass and Members of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime, pleading for change and reform in the Justice System. There is no doubt in my mind, that young boy would never understand how he could be here today. As a young child I have vivid memories of extreme violence all around me and often times looking at my beautiful mother crying and I had no idea that it was because she was experiencing extreme low self-esteem , she was a single mother raising 2 children with no help from our father. I can remember sharing a pack of candy with my mother after not eating for days due to her addictions, I can still hear my mother's stomach growling in pain even though she's been dead for 10 years. Those growls were like drums shouting over my own rumbling stomach pains. As a young boy I felt helpless because I had no idea what it meant to have low self-esteem, I just wanted love from my mother and protect my sister and best friend Chante Renee Harriel. These incidents and others are what lead me to a life of crime. In my mind it was out of need not desire, so for me instead of staying the course despite being from a dysfunctional family I decided to seek acceptance elsewhere. I joined an

organization at a very young age some will call such organizations gangs, for me these were my friends.

What made our bond so special is the fact that most of us had similar background with regards to growing up in such a dysfunctional community. Being a member of The Bloods was like being in a fraternity at USC. I had brothers that understood me, and I never had to worry about being hungry again. When I turned 14 my mother put me out the house due to my criminal behavior effectively making me homeless. So, I needed my brothers even more. By not having my father in my life, It was easy for people who had ill will to infiltrate the family, an example of this was the fact that my mother was an addict, my sister was dating the drug dealer who gave the drugs to my mother and I as a young person selling drugs for the same person that was dating my sister and poisoning my mother. I was so dysfunctional that I believed this was part of manhood and I was doing what my father couldn't do for us which was take care of my family. I in the process of believing I was a man was married and fathered a girl at a young age but had to leave them both twice by going to prison. Imagine that the family I wanted to provide a protect I left to the world. When I received my 2<sup>nd</sup> prison term *in* Illinois I knew I had hit rock bottom, not only was I over 3,000 miles away from home I also had a 9-year sentence which I completed 4 ½ years and was paroled in 1997 to leave both my wife and daughter . Going to prison was no big deal to me at that time because my community rewarded those who went to prison, you are considered a man after going to prison, ironically me being in prison was the best thing that happened to me because at 26 years of age while incarcerated I learned what it meant to be a man. I owe a great deal of credit to Everette L. Tims and Ernest Comes for seeing something in me that I didn't see in myself. I learned about the IBEW while incarcerated because Everette L. Tims was an IBEW Journeyman Electrician from Danville, Illinois and he mentored me in prison to think about becoming a Union Electrician and Ernest Comes who was a lifer mentored me in learning algebra. Upon release I entered the Maxine Waters Employment Preparation Center in watts on 103<sup>rd</sup> and Central Ave. in South Los Angeles and begin the journey of becoming an IBEW Union Electrician. The power of a man showing me what manhood was and is I knew that when I returned to society, I had the tools to produce and help build back the communities I once destroyed.

Not only did the IBEW and Morrow Meadows save my life it also gave me REDEMPTION. I only had one chance to use this platform to become a contributor to society and being a changed man for my family and community and to be honest the requirements to becoming a Union Electrician were stricter than being on parole. Not only did I think I couldn't become an electrician due to my own wall of rejection I believed that being a Union Electrician was for Caucasian men and mobster's go figure. I was so grateful that the IBEW has a place for a high school dropout, ex-con and no prior experience person like myself! knew that IFL was fortunate to get in that I would not fail. When I finished the 5-year apprenticeship I finished with a perfect attendance and the class of 2003 valedictorian, I had to spread the word. It was and still to this day the Morrow Meadows Family that hired me as an apprentice back in 1998 and showed and nurtured me to who I am today a professional Electrician , this company from founder Bob Meadows to the children who run the company now Robert Meadows, Cathleen Vick, and Karen Price (RIP) and their team of experts like Rick Jarvis, Zeke Zatorski, and Leo Black who mentored and showed me the trade and treated me like family to whereas I'm one of a few African Americans in the nation that hold the title of Diversity Manager and General Field Superintendent, due to the family believing in me and taking a chance to not' only have me working for them but others from the community working for the company also, it's truly be ground breaking what this family and its employees have been able to accomplish in its 54 year existence. I'm forever grateful for the IBEW and Morrow Meadows for giving 2<sup>nd</sup> chances.

Again, I wish I could tell that young man one day he would someday sit on the Executive Board of IBEW Local 11, and sit as a Trustee of the same union that I once thought was only for Caucasian men and mobsters thank you Marvin Kropke for believing in me. More important that he would change policies and provide career opportunities to hundreds of people that look like him and also help hundreds of others that don't look like him from all backgrounds, communities, gangs and genders and people that understand what having a second chance means.

In 1997 when I was released from prison my mother Andrea Rene Harriel decide to go and find a church home for the family and we found Abundant Life Christian Church located at 3500 S. Normandie Ave. headed by Pastor John E. Tunstall the IV. This church and its members embraced me and for the past 22 years it's truly been a blessing because when I became a Union Electrician, I was mentoring young adults and other who had come from similar backgrounds like me. When I met the founders of 2ndCall Kenny Smith and Skipp Townsend in 2008 I knew with my ties to the Unions and their organization dealing with hard core gang intervention that this c'uld be something special.

After mentoring so many young people and adults I understand not only the need for proper transitioning from prison, but the need for forgiveness. Here was a community that I helped destroy through selling drugs and violence now uplifting me and standing with me to fight in the hardest battle of my life. It was their forgiveness that allowed me to forgive myself and change. Forgiveness doesn't deserve to be given out to everyone, but it should not be withheld from those who have worked hard to earn it. I am asking this panel to forgive others that

want to earn it, to get a chance and become productive citizens. The same chance that allowed me to be here today. At 2ndCall I know that with a second chance we can help build them up with our way of life teachings at 2ndCall.

According to a national study, within three years, almost 7 out of 10 people released from prison will be re-arrested, mostly due to violating conditions from their release. Some of these causes are due to their social environment. Often times we place broken people right back into the same society that created the criminal in the first place with no tools to help them be a better person, it's like taking a shower and after getting squeaky clean I put on the same dirty clothes. How does anyone receive a fair chance at starting over with that? The current procedure for inmates released back into society are danlaging and ineffective. Not only does it hinder the inmates second chance, it harms the community welcoming them back.

2ndCall is a community-based organization founded in 2006, this organization is designed to save lives, by reducing violence and assisting in the personal development of high-risk individuals, proven offenders, ex-felons, parolees and others whom society disregards. 2ndCall has adopted a strategy to begin the healing process to uncover unresolved vicarious trauma of the participants we work with. Our methods and techniques have been implemented in the California Institute for Women in Corona, CA since 2012. 2ndCall curriculum is based on planning for rupture and repair from the "Dysfunctional Family" issues. We empower and teach from a grassroots approach with our highly trained team of 2ndCall Facilitators. We address such topics as: Low Self Esteem, Functioning in Dysfunction, Parenting & the Cycle of Violence, Domestic Violence & Anger Management, Unresolved and Vicarious Trauma, Effective Communication, Job Readiness and Retention. The way of life teachings coupled with the Life Skills we have been able to serve the re-entry population with great success because the Unions recognize the importance of the Life Skills and a large number of men and women are now picking up tape measures instead of guns, and instead of committing home invasions they are purchasing homes. There is no doubt in my mind that the reason that crime is a historic low is because of the work that 2ndCall is doing and the Unions allowing individuals with checkered backgrounds to join the Union. My hope today is that the members of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime really take a hard look at TRUE expungement and housing for re-entry individuals coming back into society and implement 2ndCall Life Skills inside of all California Prisons because if the healing process can begin before release there is a high probability that the individual will not return to the system that is designed for one to fail.

Since my release in 1997, I have carried out a commitment of change for myself and my community. I now have over 22 years of experience in the electrical industry and I'm proud to say that when I was sleeping on the floor with my daughter going through a divorce and feeling like my life was over it was the men and women of God and the fact that the IBEW and Morrow Meadows allowed me a 2<sup>nd</sup> chance that I and others that are doing this work are able to save many lives , not to mention the fact that the hands that were used to sell drugs are the same hands that has built Hospitals, Sporting Complex's, Trains Stations, Power Plants, and Water

Facilities etc. and truly believes in the helping of others no matter the race, color or creed lets do the work and we all win.

Knowing my own struggle, I have bridged the gap for people that have a record, to be successful in this trade. I've helped develop a relationship between the Unions, 2<sup>nd</sup> Call and other gang intervention programs like Homeboy Industries.

This has helped aid in the prevention of many young men and women from going back to prison.

I understand most people highlight their accomplishment in the beginning of their testimony. They often do this to demand your respect and capture your attention. I simply wanted to earn your respect today. My personal journey is unique, however relevant to today's current issues.

I am asking you to help me transition people that may not have had the same opportunities others might have had growing up. With your help, I know we can keep families together.

I stand before you now as a whole man. I no longer need validation or support to survive in this world. That little boy and that young man causes me to have the compassion for others that don't feel like their voice can be heard. My accomplishments show what hard work and assistance can do. I am honored and humbled to have had your attention today. I look forward to answering any question you may have of me and thank you for this phenomenal life changing opportunity.