

OFFERED BY COUNCILOR RUTHZEE LOUIJEUNE, WORRELL, LARA, ARROYO, BAKER, BOK, BREADON, EDWARDS, FLAHERTY, MURPHY, FERNANDES-ANDERSON AND FLYNN



CITY OF BOSTON IN CITY COUNCIL

**ORDER FOR A HEARING ON THE CIVIL RIGHTS AND
LIBERTIES OF RETURNING CITIZENS AND RE-ENTRY INTO
THEIR BOSTON COMMUNITIES.**

WHEREAS, Every year more than 3,000 people return to the City of Boston from prisons and jails, and most return from incarceration without a permanent place to live, stable income, or even a change of clothes ; *and*

WHEREAS, The Massachusetts Parole Commission found that Black and Latinx individuals are significantly overrepresented in and disproportionately affected by the criminal legal system in Massachusetts - Black people are 30% of inmates in Massachusetts state prisons and make up 18% of parole releases - moreover, studies show people of color are more likely to serve longer sentences, even after accounting for criminal history, demographics, initial charge severity, court jurisdiction, and neighborhood characteristics. ; *and*

WHEREAS, Probation fees in Massachusetts cost returning citizens more than \$20 million a year - \$65 and \$50 per month with an average probation sentence of 17-20 months and an average \$850-\$1,300 in monthly probation service fees - on top of many other court fines and fees ; *and*

WHEREAS, Increasing affordable and transitional housing in Boston is critical to the success of re-entry: a recent Boston reentry study indicates that twelve months after prison, 43 percent of individuals were staying in transitional or marginal housing ; *and*

WHEREAS, Even when a Parole Board grants a positive parole vote to an individual, it is not a guarantee of the individual's release as they must have an approved home plan, but a home plan is often denied because the client may not be listed as a tenant on a Section 8 lease due to federal regulations making it difficult for parolees to live with family in Section 8 housing ; *and*

WHEREAS, The prison system has long housed and held a significant portion of people with mental health disorders, and due to the lack of specialized services, often accelerates long-term mental health consequences, and when people leave prison many suffer from those long-term mental health consequences including a set of syndromes similar to PTSD but specific to the conditions of prison known as Post Incarceration Syndrome ; *and*

WHEREAS, The US Sentencing Commission found overall recidivism rates among older people were substantially less likely than younger offenders to recidivate following release:

over an eight-year period, 13.4 percent of offenders age 65 or older at the time of release ended up back in prison ; *and*

WHEREAS, People from communities of color between the ages of 18 and 19 are nearly 11 times more likely to be imprisoned than white males the same age, and nearly half of all are rearrested within eight years of their release ; *and*

WHEREAS, The majority, about 98 percent of returning citizens, don't have a valid driver's license, on average owing hundreds of dollars to get their licenses reinstated, and need assistance getting other important documents ; *and*

WHEREAS, 27 percent of returning citizens are looking for a job, but are still unemployed, and according to one study, a criminal record reduces the likelihood of a callback or job offer by nearly 50 percent, thus more than a quarter of formerly incarcerated people are unemployed ; *and*

WHEREAS, Studies show that correctional education and post correctional education programs are highly cost-effective pathways for reducing recidivism and improving postrelease employment outcomes. ; *and*

WHEREAS, Older returning citizens face particular challenges, as they are less likely to recidivate when compared to their younger counterparts, they experience higher rates of unemployment, homelessness, loneliness, and chronic medical conditions;

WHEREAS, Massachusetts is one of 14 states that prohibit people from voting while incarcerated for a felony in prison but return the right to vote immediately upon release, however evidence suggests that many reentering assume they remain disenfranchised upon release, and too often are not informed of their voting rights;

WHEREAS, Those served by the Office of Returning Citizens has grown by more than 700% since their first year of service in 2017, and over the last four years has served more than 1,100 clients and has provided more than 2,700 referrals to Boston providers and is currently acting as the primary referral and direct services provider for Boston's returning citizens on a limited budget; *and*

WHEREAS, Our prison and punishment system upholds a structurally racist society by disproportionately imprisoning those in Black and Latinx communities and perpetuates those inequities by providing limited resources for social and economic growth opportunity upon release from incarceration; **NOW, THEREFORE BE IT**

ORDERED: That the appropriate committee of the Boston City Council hold a hearing to discuss the civil rights and liberties of returning citizens and their re-entry into their Boston communities, and that the Office of Returning Citizens, related departments, government entities, non-profits, and interested individuals be invited to testify.

Filed in Council: March 2, 2022