

PEOPLE TALKING



THE SECOND CHANCE CAMPAIGN OF NEW JERSEY

re-entry issues

Produced and designed by Voices of Hope Productions | www.voicesofhope.tv



EXCERPTS FROM THE “COUNTING THE COSTS” STATEWIDE HEARINGS

HOSTED BY MAJORITY LEADER,
ASSEMBLYWOMAN
BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN
(DEMOCRAT) MERCER COUNTY
NEW JERSEY

*Transcribed from audio documentation by
Michael B. Jackson, Prison Nation Radio*

“**This is the critical issue** in the transformation, advancement and success of Newark NJ. We want Newark to begin to work in partnership with every sector to demonstrate that we have real answers to these problems. The appropriate comparison is not how much it costs to warehouse human beings, that’s not the whole cost and recidivism problem. The reality is, as the Center for Drug Policy Reform has already shown through a recent study that **there are so many costs to society of not empowering men and women to succeed when they come out of prison.**”

If you look at the ridiculousness of what the city spends for police, municipal courts, all to go into this game of getting men and women, who if empowered would not be involved in committing crime again. If you look at the billions of dollars that the state spends on incarceration, the billions of dollars that the city spends on it, county costs, and the like, **we could be investing this money through empowering people and end this nightmare that is going on for too many people in our state.**

In the last 2 and a half years, working with many people, we’ve been able to do things that no other city in the nation is doing. The first pro-bono legal service program in the state of NJ, which is the release program. One of the reasons why people recidivate is because of what’s called “technical parole violations”. Men and women who are trying to do the right thing, but get caught up in legal entanglements that are many times not of their own making. We have a model that we want to expand, which are free legal services for people coming out of prison. Fatherhood programs, making sure that fathers have a connection to their children. Making sure we have drug treatment programs, like Integrity House and that kids and at-risk youth are empowered to succeed. Again it was ridiculous, the juveniles, 13-14 years-old were being released from the lock-up facilities and had to go to East Orange to meet with probation officers, had to go to Cedar Street to negotiate their way back into schools, had to go to all these different locations. We now have a “One Stop” program in place to empower those young people not to fall into the trap of recidivism. A lot of good things are going on in Newark. But, the reality is that we need so much more to end the nightmare, to invest the resources that we have to make sure we create a model of what can be done.

The prison industrial complex is growing in leaps and bounds. The land of the free and the home of the brave is becoming in many ways an affront to that vision of what our country should be about. More people are incarcerated in the United States. **This is not the America of which we dream.”**

MAYOR CORY BOOKER | NEWARK, NEW JERSEY

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**“ 1972: 200,000 prisoners TODAY: 1.6 million prisoners. SAME CRIME RATE AS 1972.
There’s been an enormous expansion and size of the prison population.
With about the same crime rate as when the expansion began.**

Studies now show that first time prisoners going to prison when compared to a similar group of people who commit the same crimes, are the same age, and same background, but *do not* go to prison for their offenses—the group of people who have gone to prison have one additional felony conviction for a three year period after release from prison. By sending people to prison for the first time you increase the rate for which they commit the crimes after their prison experience. **Evidence shows that NOT going to prison decreases chances of later criminal activity and going to prison increases the chances of being convicted of a crime later.**

We spent 10 years increasing the rate of people going in, and increased their length of stay by 10 years and as a consequence we have had a 500% increase in our incarceration rate.

If you want to do something about incarceration you have to decrease the amount of people going there in the first place and have to change the length of their stay while they’re incarcerated.

It is also clear based on research regarding the relationship between incarceration rates and crime rates that **if you reduce the number of people going to prison you and if you reduce their length of stay, you won’t increase their likelihood of engaging in crime.** ”

**DR. TODD CLEAR | PROFESSOR OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE
AT JOHN JAY COLLEGE, CUNY**

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“ My son was incarcerated for five years at Northern State Prison in Newark. We were waiting for his release. It was delayed for two months and during that waiting period he had developed an abscess in his mouth. He had requested medical attention but had not received any. His jaw had swollen huge on the side of his face—Huge—and he was not able to see his girlfriend or me. I called and was told that he was not allowed visitors because he was in the infirmary and it was a weekend. My son stayed in the infirmary for that weekend and when I called Monday I had to go through the social workers. I went through the superintendent and finally they got back to me that he was doing fine. They had extracted his tooth, explained that he had the abscess. The following day he was rushed to UMDNJ and my son passed away the following day. He passed away. Nine days after his tooth was extracted. My son passed away in 2005. He had been complaining about his tooth for a very long time and the one thing my son had said was, ***Mom the only way I'm going to see someone is if I'm brought out of here in a body bag. His exact words.*** My son had said to his social worker that he had medical visits, but that he did not keep them. **He did not keep the dental appointments because someone had to escort him to the appointments and no one came to get him. My son passed away. My only child.** The medical examiner claimed that my son had lymphoma cancer. My son was robust, lifting weights. I had shown the reports to a doctor and he said how could he have had a form of cancer if he was so robust? The only medical attention that he had was before he went in and when he had the dental problem. There was never any other medical check. Requested, but not given. ”

GLORIA CARVER | TALKS ABOUT SON KEVIN

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“ I’m 25 and I just came home two weeks ago from New Jersey State Prison. **I had sixty years and I represented myself in court and won my first trial. I got found not guilty by the jury on every count.** Dealing with the social aspect of the reality that we face today, in the Black community particularly, I don’t know any other community because I was always in the Black community. **Unless we change the conditions that create the individuals that are inside of the problem, unless we change the conditions that motivate them to further the problem, and unless we change the conditions that continue this recidivism rate that we’re talking about... [incarceration] will remain...**

My poem:

we suffer incarceration. degrading. dehumanization. for many even isolation on today’s slave plantations (13th amendment) rebellion against administration is like a terrorist to this nation for these there’s a separate location called administrative segregation...

**brothers
it’s time for unification,
self-help
self education
help together—no separation
because in this there’s elevation...”**

LAMONT BOHM | CITIZEN

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“ Operation Focus is the brainchild of Deputy Mayor Ron Salahuddin, who was the Director of the Essex County Youth Detention Center. He was tired of seeing young people, 15, 16, 17-year olds who have 8, 9, 10, 12, 13 different charges or occasions which they went into the detention center so he wanted to work on a preventive measure. So, myself and the Street Doctor go into the detention center every Tuesday and we sit down with those coming home and we do an intake to see what plan we can to put into place for them once they are released. **Some of the issues that we find get in our way are: • Documentation • Birth certificates, particularly those under DYFUS care, it is very difficult for us to get, so it hampers our efforts to get them back into school. • Adults need provisional drivers licenses.** I have a young man who did a crime 8 years ago, he finished with that and has been out of trouble, he got a job offer and the only thing preventing him from getting the job was the drivers license. But he owes fines that are so big, he can't pay them so he lost out on that particular job. **PREVENTION FOR JUVENILES • Job fairs in Prisons • Programs for Entrepreneurship • Literacy Programs** Robert Johnson from UMDNJ said that the most effective way to reduce violence is with literacy programs. If a person knows how to read then they will find other ways to resolve conflict than raising their hands. **STATEWIDE In Juvenile detention centers it would be helpful if they could be learning the same amount of time as if they were in the schools. Let them be schooled for 6 hours while they are in the youth detention center.**”

**DAVID MOHAMMED
OPERATION FOCUS, CITY OF NEWARK**

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“ I did 17 years in prison.

Nobody’s heard from the people who got out.

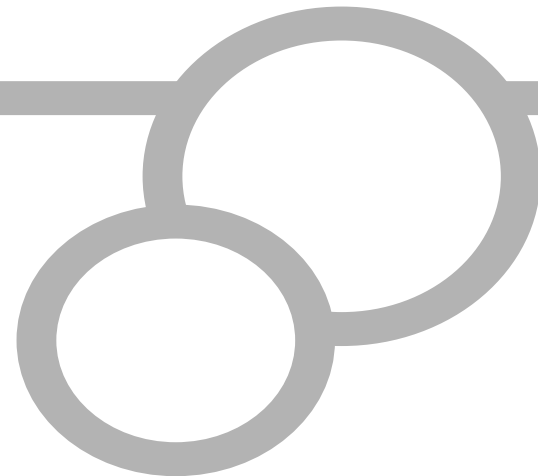
When people come home from prison they need:

- **I.D.Cards**
- **Social Security Cards**
- **Birth Certificates**
- **Bus tickets**—they don’t have money and they need bus tickets.
- **Jobs**
- **Expungement**

**When people do bad things we always point at them.
When people do good things let’s do the same thing.”**

EARL BEST, KNOWN AS “STREET DOCTOR” | NEWARK, NEW JERSEY

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“ The New Jersey Institute for Social Justice is a public policy think tank and public interest law firm. One of the issues we focus is on the issue of prisoner reentry. We have that at the top of our agenda—the cares and concerns of urban New Jersey. One of the issues that is critical to the future of the cities in New Jersey is the matter of prisoner reentry. In many of our cities, many young men have criminal records, so this is not simply a criminal justice issue, but it is also an **economic development issue**. Meaning the plight of our cities, their economic future is very much tied to the development of the workforce and in ensuring that a substantial portion of the labor market is able to compete and compete vigorously for jobs and able to contribute to the economy. **Three important issues of prisoner reentry:**

IN-PRISON EDUCATION. PHONE SURCHARGE. FELONY DRUG BAN.

It is critical to understand that the best way to be tough on crime is to first to prevent it. As a community, as a society, certainly as a state we have to be accountable for providing pathways to opportunity, specifically jobs and economic development. By doing so we save money and save valuable public resources.

The **phone surcharge** is a metaphor for a certain degree of irrationality in our criminal justice system. We have people behind bars who make collect phone calls to their loved ones, to their wives, their mothers, fathers and children and there is a 40% surcharge tax added on to the cost of the call. This charge is imposed by the state, a monopolistic arrangement. Those families taking those calls don't have a choice of carriers. Many of us with cell phones have a choice of carriers, we have a choice of telecommunications equipment. As a former telecommunications lawyer of the Federal Communications Commission, I can say very clearly that this is an unfair, uncompetitive, unbusiness-like practice that represents essentially a tax on the poor and principally a tax on women. This represents almost 3 million in tax revenues to the state—**revenue coming out of the pocketbooks of poor women.**”

**CORNELL BROOKS | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
NEW JERSEY INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE**

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“Confining people to prison is the ultimate penalty for misconduct. We should think of it that way. Confinement is the punishment, and no additional punishment is proper for a crime committed. **It is the job of criminal officials to keep criminals safe, healthy, and prepare them for their reentry into society at some future date. Those objectives are hardly debatable. The question is how best to achieve them.** The starting point is always the present situation or present conditions, the problems that are particular to the institution, the cause and what has been done about it. **That means that Legislators and the public need to know from a trustworthy, and objective source what those conditions are.** Legislators cannot count on those conditions being brought to their attention by a public constituency. **Far too few of the public think about prisons or prisoners.** I think when most people do think about it they assume that the conditions are tolerable and decent. It is not fair to hold all prison officials accountable for what they cannot control, and it is wrong to hold them unaccountable for what they can and should control. Confining criminals to a safe and healthy environment is not cheap, which is one reason for exploring alternatives to prison. The fact remains that there will be people confined and they are entitled to safe detention. In these times in particular, State budgets are looking for savings everywhere and cutting prison budgets generally get little public resistance because prisoners lack an effective constituency. **Cutting costs like education, books, libraries, recreation, coupled with dumping more bodies into prisons almost certainly leads to harsh measures and abuse. The more confinement becomes harsh and resented, the less chance of successful rehabilitation. Hope isn't a trivial factor in prisoner rehabilitation. Seeing a young person straighten out and become a productive citizen, is a thrilling result.**”

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**NICHOLAS KATZENBACH | ATTORNEY
COMMISSION ON SAFETY AND ABUSE
IN AMERICAS PRISONS**

“These were the most exciting and encouraging political events in New Jersey’s urban communities since Barack Obama. Never before have public officials come into an inner city community to listen to the thoughts of the real people, let alone move so rapidly to use the information they received from the people for action. The series of history making Town Hall meetings have resulted in legislation being introduced that will bring unprecedented positive reform to the New Jersey Criminal Justice System.

I am a proud member of the planning committee for the Counting the Costs Hearings convened by NJ Assembly Majority Speaker Bonnie Watson Coleman. I attended and recorded all of the hearings—I heard and felt the passion, desperation, and frustration expressed by the people whose lives have been negatively impacted by the criminal justice system—many involved by no fault of their own. I also heard and felt their hope that this time something might get done. I created a webpage where anyone can listen to the Counting the Costs tapes on my website www.jointfx.com, because of their historic significance and importance. I also felt that all of the people who came out to speak should know that their words did not die at the conclusion of the hearings. **I recorded over 50 hours of testimony.** I am very grateful to Majority Leader Watson-Coleman, as well as the other legislator panelists, especially Assemblyman Albert Coutinho and Assemblywoman L. Grace Spencer, who attended and sat through every minute of testimony that sometimes ran beyond 9 PM in the evening. ”

MICHAEL B. JACKSON | PRISON NATION RADIO

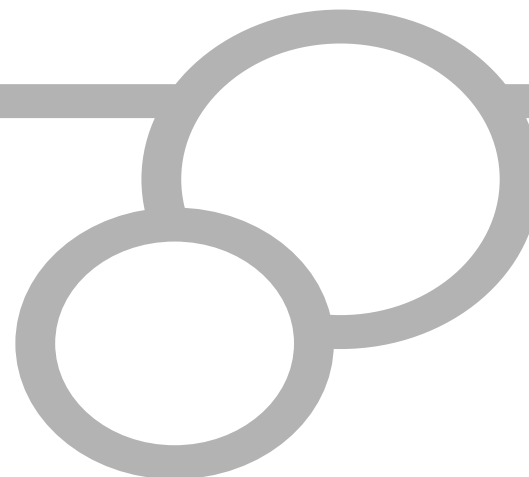
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**ABOUT THE PRODUCERS**

LORI H. ERSOLMAZ IS THE FOUNDER OF VOICES OF HOPE PRODUCTIONS, a woman-owned, award-winning, multi-media production company dedicated to creative and community-based communications and documentary filmmaking as a means to educate, engage, empower and entertain while fostering leadership, citizenship and inspiration in adults and youth to make a difference in the state of New Jersey. Lori Ersolmaz first became involved with the *Counting the Cost Hearings* while working on a production for the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence-New Jersey. She was struck by the testimony of a young man who spoke of his recent reentry and the issue he had in finding job opportunities. Although he paid his debt to society and was trying to do the right thing, he was frustrated and thought it unfair that he couldn't get a job after his reentry into society. He felt that the revolving-door situation left him no choice but to return to the life he led before his arrest. ***“His testimony, as well as that of others was compelling and made a great impact on me. That day I decided it was imperative for me to be involved in issues pertaining to successful prisoner rehabilitation and reentry. I believe personal stories from inmates, ex-prisoners, their families, employers and the Second Chance Campaign’s partners should be used to tell a story of why the criminal justice system MUST CHANGE in New Jersey. I can’t think of a more important initiative to communicate, educate and engage the widest group of citizens in urban, suburban and rural areas of New Jersey.”*** Short documentaries can be viewed on **www.voicesofhope.tv**

MICHAEL B. JACKSON IS THE FOUNDER OF PRISON NATION RADIO and is the author and publisher of several books, including the best-selling *New York Times* Top Choice, “How to Do Good After Prison: A Handbook for Successful Reentry”. A native of Newark, NJ and formerly incarcerated, MBJ is also an inspirational speaker and the founder and host of the Internet based radio station Prison Nation Radio at **www.jointfx.com**, and he has worked in adult and juvenile corrections and parole for more than 32 years. He has been featured in numerous magazines and newspapers and has appeared on several national radio and television shows.

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