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**Testimony of the Council for Court Excellence
Before the Committee on Housing of the District of Columbia
Performance Oversight Hearing for the Mayor's Office of Returning Citizen Affairs**

January 22, 2026

Thank you, Chairperson White, for the opportunity to testify at today's Performance Oversight Hearing on the Mayor's Office of Returning Citizen Affairs (MORCA). My name is Tariq Hardiman, and I am providing this testimony in my capacity as the Open Horizon Civil Justice Fellow for the Council for Court Excellence (CCE). CCE is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization with the mission of bringing people together to conduct research, educate, and advocate to make D.C.'s unique legal systems more just, equitable, and accountable to the community. For more than 40 years, CCE has worked to improve the administration of justice in the courts and related agencies in D.C. through research and policy analysis, convening diverse stakeholders, and creating educational resources for the public. Please note that in accordance with our policy, no judicial member of CCE participated in the formulation or approval of this testimony. This testimony does not reflect the specific views of, or endorsement by, any judicial member of CCE.

In 2023, CCE launched the Second Chance Hiring Alliance (SCHA). This program brings together D.C.-based business and nonprofit leaders, workforce development programs, government agencies like MORCA, and returning citizens to promote hiring of those with criminal records, especially returning citizens.

Through SCHA's work, we have seen the necessary supports returning citizens need to reintegrate into our community effectively, and we appreciate MORCA's role in providing programming and resources to connect returning citizens to "employment, health, education, housing assistance, and social services."ⁱ

In December, CCE and SCHA published an extensive report examining D.C.'s reentry efforts in comparison to neighboring jurisdictions, revealing that District residents returning from incarceration consistently struggle to find employment due to inconsistent and disjointed coordination among service providers and inadequate job opportunities that align with the skillset of interested individuals.ⁱⁱ Through interviews, case studies, and discussions with government agencies, employers, and returning citizens, our report suggested DC can improve outcomes for returning citizens by securing a dedicated operating budget for MORCA, increasing transparency around the services and programs MORCA provides to returning citizens, improving referral tracking, and expanding their data collection and reporting processes to allow for more robust evaluation of services offered, like the Access to Jobs grant and the Commission of Re-Entry and Returning Citizens Affairs. We will now provide a high-level overview of our key findings and opportunities for MORCA to better support returning citizens.

Operating Budget. First, the Council should ensure MORCA has a dedicated operating budget to protect the crucial support MORCA provides to returning citizens in DC and clarify

which entities have oversight over MORCA. Last year, MORCA's operating budget was subsumed by the Mayor's Office of Community Affairs (MOCA) and decreased from \$2.9 millionⁱⁱⁱ in FY 2025 to \$1.8 million^{iv} under the new budget, a reduction of over \$1 million. The number of full-time employees remains the same, and MORCA has stated that programming will remain unaffected by the change. We ask that MORCA explain how it achieved a \$1 million budget reduction without staffing or programming changes. We encourage Council to restore MORCA's funding to FY 2025 levels to ensure that MORCA can provide vital reentry support and programming to returning citizens in FY 2026. In 2025, around 8,000 people were estimated to have been released from BOP^v and DOC^{vi} facilities into D.C. MORCA's budget should support services for as many of these returning citizens as possible. CCE would also like your thoughts, Chairman White, on whether, because of MORCA being moved under the umbrella of the Mayor's Office of Community Affairs (MOCA), CCE should also testify before MOCA. And given MORCA's function, if we also should testify at the Performance Hearing for the Deputy Mayor of Public Safety.

Transparency of Services Provided. Next, MORCA should increase transparency around the types of services it provides to the community. In general, information available via MORCA's website on the availability and requirements to participate in MORCA's programs is lacking, likely resulting in the underutilization of MORCA's programs among returning citizens and confusion among other reentry organizations. To improve transparency and accessibility of MORCA services to the public, we recommend that MORCA provide enhanced descriptions and participation requirements on its website for services including: the Commission on Re-Entry and Re-Entering Citizens, the Georgetown Paralegal Program, the Access to Jobs Grant, and Commercial Driver License training. It also remains unclear if MORCA outsources services to specialized partner organizations in the community. In last year's testimony, MORCA provided only a broad description of referrals to outside programs and identified four community-based organizations (CBOs).^{vii} If this reflects the full scope of MORCA's coordination, community members will likely be concerned about the breadth of MORCA's partnerships. Our research indicates that many stakeholders view MORCA as a central locale for a broader continuum of care, and many believe that MORCA should foster connections with other well-situated CBOs to maximize service delivery. If MORCA refers returning citizens to different organizations, MORCA should regularly liaise with the organizations to maintain up-to-date information on the recommended programming. Therefore, we recommend that MORCA provide greater clarity on how frequently MORCA engages with partner CBOs to confirm that referred programs remain active, accessible, and robust.

Referral Tracking and Case Management. In addition, MORCA should improve case management and referral-tracking processes by measuring how often referrals result in service use. Specifically, the community would benefit from knowing whether referred clients reach the partner organizations and receive the necessary services. Returning citizens and CBOs interviewed for SCHA's report noted that referrals lacked adequate follow-through, particularly because arranging transportation to receive services from other locations is difficult, suggesting more intentional introductions and continued contact with MORCA may be necessary for referrals to succeed.^{viii} Additionally, if MORCA has formal relationships with community partner organizations offering workforce development services, we also recommend that MORCA list such partners on their website to increase public awareness of partner programs. As a central coordinating body, MORCA refers several clients to other organizations to receive specialized services. Accordingly, more insight into MORCA's relationships with partner organizations, case management processes, and whether referrals are formally tracked to assess outcomes and service effectiveness would be appreciated.

Data Collection on Returning Citizens and Employment Outcomes.

Third, MORCA should increase efforts to understand how many DC residents residing in Bureau of Prisons facilities across the country are scheduled to return to DC each year and increase communication with these individuals to facilitate their transition back home better. With an accurate picture of how many returning citizens will be returning to the District, MORCA would be better able to accommodate them accordingly and evaluate their effectiveness in serving as many returning citizens as possible. In 2024, MORCA stated that it lacked oversight of BOP systems needed to accurately determine how many individuals return home from incarceration each year, stating that a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the two entities was yet to be finalized.^{ix} We encourage MORCA to finalize this MOU so that the community can better understand the needs of DC's returning citizens.

In last year's Performance Oversight responses, MORCA was asked to evaluate the feasibility of creating a data collection system to monitor employment outcomes for returning citizens, and MORCA leaders stated that it would provide data regarding employment stability and recidivism, as well as a process to track client engagement and employment outcomes. Without a system to collect this data, oversight of MORCA program effectiveness is difficult. For example, according to the MORCA FY 2023 Performance Annual Review, 77% of clients were employed, but in FY 2024, MORCA reported an employment rate of 17.6%.^x We encourage MORCA to establish a data collection and reporting system that will allow the Council and the public to evaluate the effectiveness of MORCA's services, including what led to the percentage of clients employed in FY 2024.

Access to Jobs Grant Program. In addition, we recommend that MORCA improve available data and information regarding the Access to Jobs grant and its outcomes. Employers, workforce development programs, and the larger reentry community are curious about MORCA's plans to expand this program's funding to accommodate more than 10 returning citizens per year, potentially. We encourage MORCA to report on whether the Access to Jobs Grant program will be expanded in the future. Additionally, while researching for our report, we heard concerns that employers may fire returning citizen employees after the two-year subsidy provided through the Access to Jobs Grant ends, thereby defeating the program's purpose of hiring and retaining returning citizens. We recommend that MORCA provide data on job retention for Access to Jobs Grant Program recipients for at least 3 years after the individual receives a job placement under this grant and collect feedback from employers and participants to clarify any ambiguity in the program's effectiveness.

Moreover, we recommend that MORCA advertise the Access to Jobs Grant program and extend the application period to increase the participation of diverse employers. In FY 2025, only 7 out of 17 interested employers applied for the grant program, leading the public to believe that quick turnaround times and insufficient promotion led to a reduction in available opportunities.^{xi} In addition, the 2025 Access to Job Grant application opened on September 12, 2025, and closed on October 3, 2025, leaving only 14 business days to find the listing and prepare their application.^{xii} We recommend that MORCA better advertise this grant and lengthen the application period to make it easier for additional eligible employers to apply to participate in this program. We recommend that MORCA increase promotion for this program and work to expand to subsidize wages above minimum wage.

Effectiveness of the Commission on Re-Entry and Returning Citizens. Finally, we recommend MORCA increase public communication about the Commission on Re-Entry and Returning Citizens to improve transparency and understanding of the Commission's role. Specifically, MORCA should publish information on the Commission's goals, engagement levels from ex-officio

members, average attendance by voting members, and strategies to increase consistent participation. The public would also benefit from information regarding the authority of voting members, specifically whether they have veto power over policy recommendations and proposed legislation. Lastly, in FY 2025, the Commission stated that it was developing its top 5 priorities for the year.^{xiii} We recommend that MORCA provide an update on those priorities.

In closing, we deeply appreciate MORCA's commitment to supporting returning citizens in our community and stand ready to support MORCA in efforts to improve communication and data collection to evaluate the effectiveness of its programs better.

Thank you for your time.

ⁱ <https://communityaffairs.dc.gov/morca>.

ⁱⁱ <https://scha-dc.org/reentryworkforceinnovation/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ https://cfo.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ocfo/publication/attachments/rc_orca_chapter_2026o.pdf.

^{iv} https://cfo.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ocfo/publication/attachments/aa_mayor_chapter_2026o.pdf

^v http://bop.gov/about/statistics/statistics_inmate_releases.jsp.

^{vi} https://jsat.cjcc.dc.gov/public-safety-and-justice-dashboard/quarterly-reports/adult/detention_and_incarceration_data/departments_of_corrections.

^{vii} <https://dccouncil.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/rca25.pdf>.

^{viii} <https://scha-dc.org/reentryworkforceinnovation/>.

^{ix} <https://dccouncil.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/rca25.pdf>.

^x <https://oca.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/oca/FY24%20PAR%20-%20MORCA.pdf>.

^{xi} <https://dccouncil.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/rca25.pdf>.

^{xii}

<https://communityaffairs.dc.gov/sites/moca/files/dc/sites/moca/publication/attachments/FY26%20Access%20to%20Jobs%20Grant%20-%20NOFA.pdf>.

^{xiii} https://oca.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/oca/page_content/attachments/MORCA.pdf.