

Public Safety Committee Testimony

March 5, 2025 9:30 am

Chair Abrams, Vice Chair Miller, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Public Safety Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify in favor of the Governor's Budget Proposal on Reentry Programs and Services.

My name is Lamont Clark, and I am here to advocate for returning citizens, particularly those struggling with PTSD and mental health challenges after incarceration.

At 20 years old, I was wrongfully convicted and sent to prison. The experience tested me mentally in ways I never could have imagined. I have seen firsthand how incarceration affects the mind—how men and women endure trauma, loss, and isolation without any support, only to be released back into society without the tools to cope. PTSD is real, and it deeply impacts how returning citizens think, feel, and interact with the world.

In the military, soldiers are debriefed and provided support for PTSD. Yet, men and women coming home from prison—many of whom have endured years of trauma—receive little to no mental health assistance. Access to healthcare services is often inadequate, and those who need help the most are left to struggle in silence. I lost my mother just eight months after coming home, and I have watched countless others experience devastating losses while incarcerated. Too often, they are released with no counseling, no resources, and no guidance on how to heal.

I am a proud member of Voices of Injustice, a group of wrongfully convicted men who raise awareness about the challenges of reentry, including PTSD, through stage plays and community engagement. We collaborate with organizations such as Cleveland State University, Warrensville Heights Schools, the ACLU, the Bar Association, and many others to shed light on the mental health struggles that returning citizens face.

I am standing here today because I sought help. I found a therapist. But too many returning citizens do not get that chance. I urge this committee to ensure that reentry funding prioritizes mental health services, trauma-informed care, and accessible therapy options for those coming home. If we truly want people to succeed after incarceration, we must invest in their mental well-being.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to addressing these critical issues. I welcome any questions.