



'DYNAMIC DUO' An expert panel discusses opportunities of pursuing CTE and apprenticeships.

CTE, APPRENTICESHIPS: Game-changers for Communities

Apprenticeships and career and technical education are nontraditional pathways to career success, ones oftentimes overlooked by African Americans because of lingering stigmas, according to an expert panel during the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's 46th Annual Legislative Conference. That's a key message that emerged during a Sept. 16 issue forum hosted by the Augustus F. Hawkins Foundation.

By Arnesa A. Howell

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MAKING STRIDES: JOBS COALITION ACCOMPLISHMENTS



While raising awareness of workforce challenges and potential barriers to employment, the JOBS Coalition and its members have combined their resources and industry expertise to achieve the following results:

- Built the Bellevue Resource Center, a program facility serving the hard-to-reach, hard-to-employ, and returning ex-offender populations. The Center was completed on September 30, 2003.
- Guided the creation of the Construction & Design Academy at Cardozo, providing District students access, training, and preparation for careers in the construction industry and trades after graduation. The Academy officially opened in September 2005. □



FAMILY MATTERS DOJ Second Chance Fellow Daryl Atkinson attributes a family culture of support to his success after prison.

EX-OFFENDER REENTRY PROGRAMS FOCUS ON FATHERHOOD, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

The men on the panel come from all walks of life: a former police chief, an ex-offender, and an advocate for newly released prisoners. Each speaker dives into his personal story and experiences, sometimes punctuating comments with a national statistic on incarceration. Different journeys converging to address a single issue: ex-offender reentry.

By Arnesa A. Howell

“We’re going to look at the problem,” said Rep. Danny Davis (D-Ill.) in opening remarks of the session on ex-offenders and reentry. “Many of us don’t know there are 70 million people in this country with records.”

This 2016 forum, hosted by Davis during the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's 46th Annual Legislative Conference, examined programs and initiatives that are helping fathers and other returning citizens successfully transition back into the community and rejoin their families. These are important issues that must be addressed, Davis said, not only because having a criminal record oftentimes negatively impacts employability, but also weakens the

black family structure.

The congressman explained that there are children who grow up without the opportunity to see – or know – their fathers. “I don’t know a single black family that is not impacted by this issue of reentry,” Davis added.

Framework of Family

Daryl Atkinson knows both sides of the coin. As the Second Chance fellow for the Department of Justice, Atkinson said the DOJ's work around reentry falls into three categories: policy, grantmaking programs and “bully pulpit,” a position of authority from which to advocate or influence public issues. But before

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Department of Labor's Daniel Villao says apprenticeships are a 'level playing field.'



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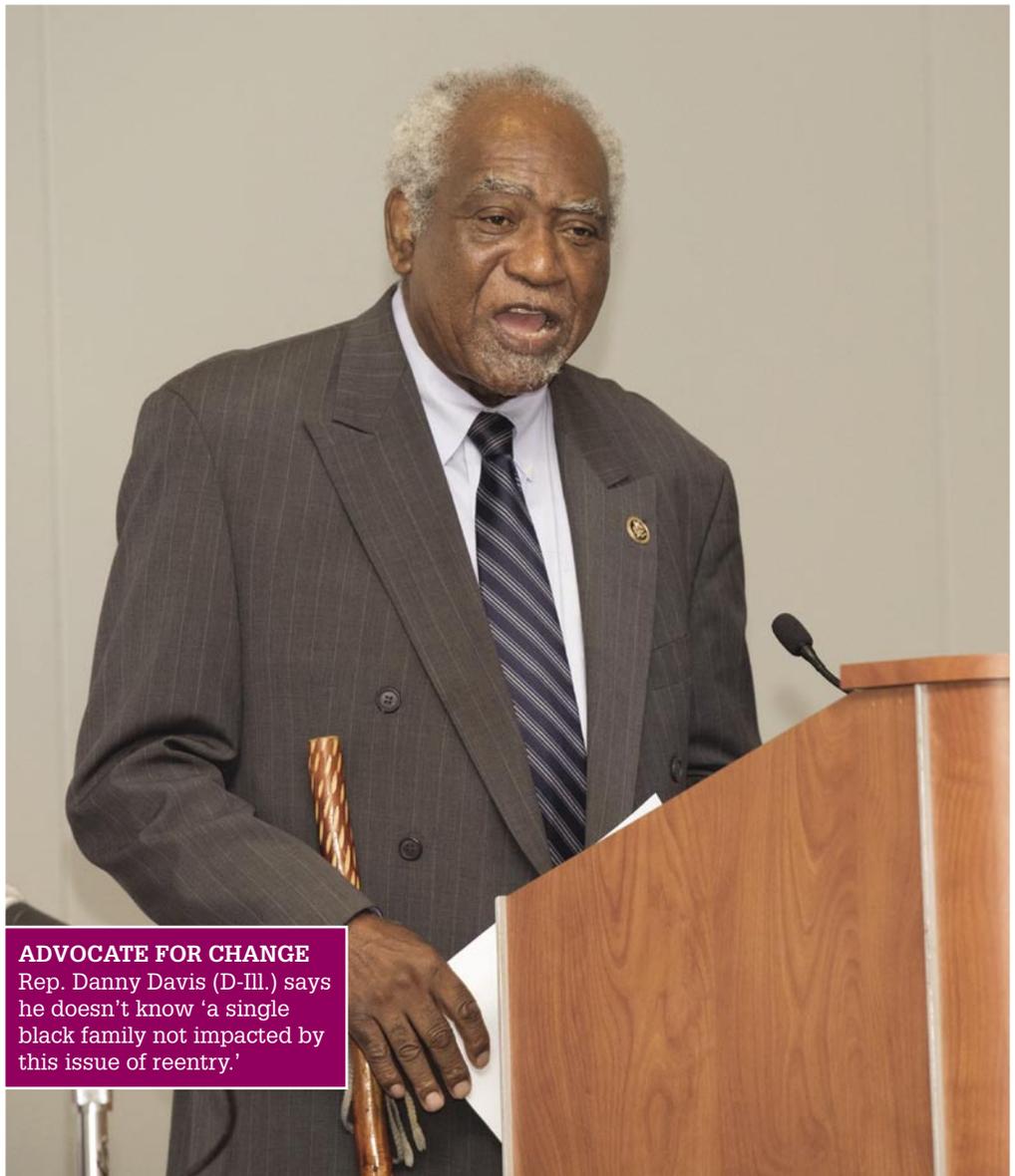
“Apprenticeships can be an alternative to college,” said Deborah Carroll, director of the District of Columbia Department of Employment Services, emphasizing the importance of introducing youth to the full spectrum of opportunities when making their career path decisions.

Today’s apprenticeship programs embody more than the well-known hands-on element found in skilled trades, according to Kenneth Rigmaiden, general president with the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades. “To anyone who’s curious about an apprenticeship program, I don’t want them to think that it’s just strong arms, strong back and just go out and get the job done,” said Rigmaiden.

Oftentimes a discussion of apprenticeship programs focuses on training in areas such as carpentry or electrical, among the skilled trades under the umbrella of career and technical education. But that is changing. With advancements in technology, industry experts point to a rebranding of CTE to include science, technology, engineering and math education, or STEM. Rigmaiden noted that there’s an alignment between apprenticeship, opportunity and STEM.

Fellow panelist Lisa Ransom, chairwoman and CEO of the Augustus F. Hawkins Foundation, said that broadening one’s perspective can lead to financial gains – especially important for African-American women striving to shrink the gender pay equity gap. She cited the often-quoted – and sometimes questioned – “78 cents” a woman makes on the dollar paid to men. That figure, Ransom stressed, doesn’t reflect the earnings of women of color: “For black women, the salary is 60 cents for every dollar and for Latina women it’s 54

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ADVOCATE FOR CHANGE

Rep. Danny Davis (D-Ill.) says he doesn’t know ‘a single black family not impacted by this issue of reentry.’

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delving into the agency’s initiatives, he stressed the importance of building the discussion around the “overarching framework of family.”

“How should we think about our people returning home? Because that’s what they are, they are people,” said Atkinson, who smacked down common identifiers like ex-offenders, felons and convicts. “They are members of our community, they are members of our family.”

The dialogue resonated with Atkinson for another reason, too. In 1996, he was convicted of a first time nonviolent drug crime and sentenced to 10 years in prison. Atkinson said he served a mandatory 40 months on that sentence before being released in 1999. On Nov. 4 of that year, his parents rented a Lincoln Town Car and picked him up from a maximum-security prison where “60 percent of the population had life without parole.”

Years later, he would ask why they rented such a fancy car on the day of his release. The simple answer: “To show you that period in life didn’t completely define you, and we have a set of expect-

tations for you now that you’ve returned home.”

With that family culture of support, Atkinson has gone on to earn a series of academic degrees (from associate’s to Juris Doctor), is licensed to practice law in Minnesota and North Carolina, and has been honored by the White House as a “Champion of Change” in removing barriers for people with criminal records.

“The only thing that separated me from them is that I had that loving support system and an environment where I could succeed,” he told the audience.

Similarly, DOJ is also pushing initiatives to support the success of those transitioning back into their communities. The Bureau of Justice Assistance has issued more than “700 grants totaling over half a billion dollars” to reentry service providers nationwide for transitional services like housing, job training, food and shelter, said Atkinson. On the policy front, the Office of Personnel Management has proposed a rule to “ban the box” for federal employment, giving people with records a “fair opportunity” to get a job. The

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Department of Education initiated a Pell Grant program for incarcerated persons, opening up access to post-secondary education with the goal of being a life-changer for these individuals. And the Department of Housing and Urban Development, added Atkinson, has issued guidance to housing providers that “using criminal record history as an automatic barrier to rent or buy a home can run afoul of the Fair Housing Act and be deemed as racial discrimination.”

‘Engagement Over Enforcement’

Federal agencies aren’t alone in working to close the opportunity gap. In Cincinnati, Ohio, Jeffrey Blackwell implemented reentry initiatives that he said positively impacted the community. The former Cincinnati police chief stressed community engagement over locking up people. “I believe in engagement over enforcement, and lifting up communities,” said Blackwell, later adding, “Policing needs a tune-up – I’m just being nice, the engine’s blown and it needs to be replaced.”

Under his leadership, the Cincinnati police department started programs like “Right to Read,” putting officers full time in elementary schools to teach third graders how to read. “Why not interrupt the cradle to prison pipeline by helping these young brothers and sisters pass that test?” he asked. His leadership style, however, didn’t go unchallenged. He was fired from that position in 2015.

Meanwhile, Albert “AL” Long, vice president of the Juvenile Justice Division for Correctional Management & Communications Group, also in Cincinnati, has adopted a “creative” approach to helping those reluctant to change. It’s a three-week program structured like a “professional bootcamp” that he believes can be used by correctional institutions and halfway houses. “There is no option for failure,” he stressed.

The program emphasizes networking, self-awareness and conflict resolution. Community partnerships are key to these individuals transitioning into the workforce, with partners providing interview-appropriate attire like suits and dresses, and rigorous job interview prep.

Fatherhood First

For Halbert Sullivan, changing the mindset is the first step in changing lives. “If a person isn’t ready,

he may pretend, but he’s not going to do too much,” said Sullivan, himself a recovering drug addict with multiple stints behind bars. When ready, he made a life change and went on to earn a master’s degree.

As the CEO of the Fathers’ Support Center in St. Louis, Mo., he strives to reconnect black fathers to their families and communities. The goal of the organization he founded in 1997 is to get fathers involved – and employed – to alter the “trajectory” of their children. Sullivan cited statistics indicating that in homes with absent fathers, children are more likely to use drugs, drop out of high school, and become juvenile offenders. He said teenage girls are more likely to get pregnant and continue the cycle. But a challenge for many of these fathers: a background with felonies. It’s a reason reentry work became a key component of outreach.

“We work with a project in the penitentiary where we go in and provide parenting and other relationship skills building,” explained Sullivan. “But we also take a family therapist in so we can begin to reconnect [fathers to their families],” particularly the kids.

All reentry programs include vocational skills training. “The main goal at the end of the day,” said Sullivan, “is employment.”

The Big Picture

The panelists laid out programs aimed at making a positive impact on the lives, communities and people they have served. Their storied paths have taken them to the front lines of the reentry discussion, including bringing them to this year’s forum helmed by Davis. “I have a lot of respect for people who take the tough challenges,” Davis said during the two-hour panel.

Observers might argue Davis is one of those people. As a longtime champion of legislation to help ex-offenders, he spearheaded the Second Chance Act. It aimed to reduce recidivism by boosting resources for transitional services available to the formerly incarcerated. With the millions of people in this country with records, according to Davis, reentry issues are increasingly on the radar of leadership and policymakers at the state-level.

“We are indeed making progress with this issue,” said Davis, but there is more to be done to whittle down the numbers. □



ATTORNEY BENJAMIN CRUMP CALLS FOR ACTION AGAINST INJUSTICE, GIVES NOD TO CIVIL RIGHTS LEADERS

Attorney Benjamin Crump. His name is best known from representing the families of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown, two young black men whose shooting deaths sent shockwaves through black communities across the country and polarized a nation. Their deaths brought the issue of racial bias in policing to the forefront. On Sept. 17, Crump gave an impassioned speech as the keynote speaker during a reentry forum convened by Rep. Danny Davis (D-Ill.).

“Us in the legal profession ... and I say us because all lawyers and judges, we’re part of this legal profession that continues to intellectually justify these atrocities,” Crump said.

He cited Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from the Birmingham jail” that stated: “One has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws.” Crump said he believed King’s words extended to lawyers, who have an obligation to take action in the face of injustice. “We’re not asking everybody to be on the front lines with me,” he said, adding that everyone can do something to put their “fancy degrees” to work.

From the Flint water crisis in Michigan to the state of mass incarceration in the

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JOBS Coalition Pathways

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[cents].”

“When you have an opportunity to engage in a nontraditional occupation where the salary rates are higher,” explained Ransom, “you’re making more money to take care of your family and build your economic security.”

And a place where the wage gap issue is non-existent? Registered apprenticeships, according to Daniel Villao, deputy administrator at the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Apprenticeship, because “registered apprenticeship is a level playing field” regardless of a worker’s race or gender.

Fighting Misconceptions

When it comes to CTE, one of the biggest misconceptions is that it only includes the traditional approach to construction. “This is not just shovel and screwdriver work,” said Villao, noting that this work is very technically advanced. A worker

can walk into a building with an iPad and download blueprints, he added.

Meanwhile, Terry Riley, a former Kansas City Council member in Missouri and president of the consulting firm Transformation Consultants, called for the education of elected officials to “get beyond the rhetoric” when it comes to getting people back to work in communities. As an example, Riley cited a project where workforce development included partnership with building trades and union outreach.

Across the panel, there was a consensus of the need to increase awareness about the benefits and opportunities within apprenticeships, and through a pursuit of career and technical education. A lack of knowledge, said one expert, is among the biggest hurdles impacting apprenticeships.

Said Villao, who stressed the value of these programs for employers and workers: “Apprenticeship is the best-kept secret in America.” □

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United States, Crump touched on the issues that overwhelmingly impact African-American communities. He has earned a reputation for taking on the “tough cases” in “law enforcement misconduct,” said Davis.

In a nod to former Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, Crump stressed that every baby has the same rights regardless of the race and life circumstance of the mother. “You know that’s not the case in America today, but I challenge anybody to say that’s not the goal worth fighting for,” said Crump, also the co-founder of the MyDAD.org, which includes a program to strengthen families by empowering fathers. The program provides job-readiness, financial literacy and other resources to struggling fathers, including those transitioning from jail or prison back into their communities.

As his 15-minute address came to a close, Crump gave the audience these parting words: “When we stand up for justice for the Trayvon Martin’s of the world – and the unknown Trayvon Martin’s of the world – what we’re really doing is making America live up to its creed of being this great beacon of hope and justice that she presents herself [to be] to the rest of the world.” – AAH □

JOBS COALITION MISSION STATEMENT

We will work together to develop a long-term strategy that creates an environment where aspiring District residents will have unprecedented opportunity to succeed. We strive to create a fair and open system, supported by government, industry, employers and the education and faith-based communities, which seeks to properly train today’s apprentices while making an unparalleled commitment to educating students and others not yet in the workforce.



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