

ProjectNewOpportunity

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Sessions Memorandum decried by those who know best what it means

Beneficiaries of sentencing reforms, Obama's Clemency explain the pain, loss and true cost of Session's return to mandatory minimum sentences and inflexible charging policies

In a Memorandum released on 10 May 2017, Attorney General Session ordered all federal prosecutors to follow harsh, inflexible charging and sentencing practices. The Attorney General's order is especially painful to two unique groups of former federal defendants:

- The 1,700 individuals to whom President Obama granted clemency and
- The nearly 30,000 individuals whose sentences were shortened as a result of changes in federal sentencing guidelines for drug offense authorized by the United States Sentencing Commission with Congress' concurrence.

Many of these individuals have compelling stories demonstrating strength, endurance and the power of hope as they confront the challenges of returning to families and communities after years of separation and isolation. Organizations such as the Center of Community Alternatives' **Project New Opportunity** who have helped both groups as they leave federal incarceration have a unique window into their lives past and looking forward.

Project New Opportunity's Project Director Malcolm Young describes those his group has helped: "These are people who, if Sessions had his way would still be incarcerated, but through grace now are building new lives. These are people who during years or decades of incarceration lost parents, sisters and brothers, spouses and children. These are people working hard to overcome the effects of incarceration and to learn ---and earn--- their way in a changed world. Among them are people whose talents, capabilities and contributions are waiting to be tapped, people with good lives to live and much to give."



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“Their stories challenge Sessions with this question: ‘What does America gain by locking people like them up for so long, in such large numbers?’”

Example #1: A 57-year-old man, granted clemency, after 10 years, eager to return to work, does so successfully, and now is the care provider for his disabled parents, staving off their institutionalization and giving them a last year or so with their son.

Example #2: A 46-year-old man in distress after 7 years in prison because one son was killed in a car accident and the other is on the streets, a substance abuser, the father, couldn’t help while incarcerated.

Example #3: A 30-year-old man who after 10 years incarcerated is now working part time, going to school to get a commercial driver’s license. He spent time helping other people who have come out of the system with information, trying to make things a little easier.

Norman Brown, Project New Opportunity’s Deputy Director, is a returning citizen who served 24 ½ years of a life sentence commuted by President Obama. Norman now assists people coming home from prison and coordinates Project New Opportunity’s Reentry Consultants. He also counsels youth in the District of Columbia’s Youth Rehabilitation Center for the organization Grow-Up Grow Out. Norman has participated in numerous panels at the White House, Google, Innovation Lab, and reentry conferences and forums discussing mass incarceration and reentry strategies.

For more information including profiles of clemency recipients and of people who are beneficiaries of changes to federal sentencing guidelines, incarcerated for wasted years under the policies just like those to which Attorney General Ashcroft will return us, email or telephone:

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