



**National  
Urban League**

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**Empowering Communities.  
Changing Lives.**

April 25, 2019

The Honorable Marco Rubio  
Chairman  
U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business  
& Entrepreneurship  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Benjamin L. Cardin  
Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business  
& Entrepreneurship  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Rubio and Ranking Member Cardin:

As President and CEO of the National Urban League, and on behalf of its 90 affiliates representing 300 communities in 36 states and the District of Columbia, we are pleased to extend our full support for the *New Start Act of 2019* (S.1077), introduced by Ranking Member Cardin. S.1077 creates a reentry program within the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) to award grants to organizations, or partnerships between organizations, to provide business counseling and entrepreneurial development training to returning citizens.

The *New Start Act* would be especially beneficial to communities of color who are disproportionately impacted by our criminal justice system. According to a brief by the Vera Institute of Justice,<sup>1</sup> Black men comprise about 13% of the male population, but about 35% of those incarcerated. One in three Black men born today can expect to be incarcerated in his lifetime, compared to one in six Latino men, and one in 17 white men.<sup>2</sup> Black women are similarly impacted: one in 18 Black women born in 2001 is likely to be incarcerated sometime in her life, compared to one in 111 white women.<sup>3</sup> Their lives are further compounded upon release, facing dim prospects for employment given their criminal record.

Entrepreneurial development programs for formerly incarcerated individuals report dramatically lower rates of recidivism, and self-employment can provide economic stability for those who are otherwise locked out of the labor market. The *New Start Act* will provide returning citizens with an additional opportunity for economic security through entrepreneurship and reduce the chances of recidivism as they re-enter their communities.

The *New Start Act* is perfectly aligned with the work of the National Urban League with regards to returning citizens. We have been serving the formerly incarcerated for more than fifty years. Through our reentry services, enrolled participants are afforded the opportunity to earn industry-recognized credentials, learn employment-focused skills, and form positive relationships with their communities. We offer workforce development, targeted training, mentoring, and support services through the help of our Urban League Affiliates.

Additionally, through our signature Entrepreneurship Center Program in twelve Urban League Affiliates, we provide individualized counseling, mentoring and training services geared toward the development of management skills that will enable minority entrepreneurs to grow their businesses, obtain financing or contracts, and preserve or create jobs. Returning citizens are

included among our program clients. One such client is the story of Loutricia Gibbs-Tolbert and her husband Charles, who both had been incarcerated at one point in their lives:

*Early in Loutricia Gibbs-Tolbert's life, she found herself at odds with the law. This experience caused her to be incarcerated and set the tone for her personal growth in learning her strength in becoming an entrepreneur and in helping others.*

*Afterwards, at the age of nineteen, Loutricia left home, as do many teens, to attend college in South Carolina. She studied Business Administration, receiving an Associate's degree within two years. Loutricia then transferred to Rollins College, where she studied Psychology and Education, earning a Bachelor's degree and becoming certified in Secondary education within three years.*

*Combining her education and personal experiences, Loutricia founded Die-Rections as a ministry providing advocacy and outreach to returning citizens and those who may be headed toward an encounter with the criminal justice system.*

*Die-Rections has emerged as a ministry due to the true life experiences of both Charles and Loutricia that caused them to stop and take a serious look at the downward-spiraling course their lives were taking and to envision how they could help others choose their paths wisely, with a final destination in mind.*

*In addition to Die-Rections, the couple also co-founded Steaks Plus, a wholesale meat delivery business designed to create a path towards the Tolbert's financial independence.*

*As clients of the Jacksonville Urban League Entrepreneurship Center, the Tolberts have access to coaching, technical assistance, and small business capital. Thomas B. Waters, Entrepreneurship Center Director has met with Ms. Gibbs-Tolbert on numerous occasions to provide guidance on their ventures. Loutricia now has her own media presence, and has also appeared on numerous television, news, and radio talk shows.*

This legislation is a critical next step after the bipartisan passage of the *First Step Act* last year and builds upon the successes of entrepreneurial development programs across the country. The National Urban League believes that when returning citizens come home after paying their debt to society, it is our job to equip them with the tools they need to rebuild their lives. We call on Congress to pass the *New Start Act* and provide returning citizens with another tool to successfully return to their local communities.

Sincerely,



Marc H. Morial  
President and CEO  
National Urban League

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<sup>1</sup> "An Unjust Burden: The Disparate Treatment of Black Americans in the Criminal Justice System," By Elizabeth Hinton, Assistant Professor, Department of History and Department of African and African American Studies, Harvard University, LeShae Henderson, Special Assistant, Research, Vera Institute of Justice, and Cindy Reed, Senior Editor, Vera Institute of Justice, May 2018. Accessed at [https://storage.googleapis.com/vera-web-assets/downloads/Publications/for-the-record-unjust-burden/legacy\\_downloads/for-the-record-unjust-burden-racial-disparities.pdf](https://storage.googleapis.com/vera-web-assets/downloads/Publications/for-the-record-unjust-burden/legacy_downloads/for-the-record-unjust-burden-racial-disparities.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>d.

<sup>3</sup>d.