



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY **McDonough**  
SCHOOL *of* BUSINESS

April 29, 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:

On behalf the Georgetown University Pivot Program, a certificate program in business and entrepreneurship designed specifically for formerly incarcerated individuals, I am writing to express our support for the *NEW START Act of 2019* (S. 1077), introduced by Ranking Member Cardin, which 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.

It is well known that the US has the highest rate of incarceration of any major nation in the world – even outpacing Cuba, Rwanda, and the Russian Federation. *95%* of those individuals currently under incarcerations *will be released*, and *all* will face significant employment hurdles when they return to their communities, due to employment restrictions and biases in hiring practices. We also know that unemployment is the single largest driver of recidivism.

For many returning citizens, creating their own entrepreneurial venture is the best (and possibly only) solution to these employment obstacles. However, entrepreneurship is risky in the best of circumstances, and for formerly-incarcerated individuals the challenge is even greater. Many of these aspiring entrepreneurs struggle to re-establish credit and lack even the basic management training or experience that is so vitally necessary.

Entrepreneurship-oriented reentry programs, like the Pivot Program, are designed to address this – by providing highly deserving and talented individuals with the necessary training and access to professional networks that will be fundamental as they launch and grow their businesses. Through legislation like the *NEW START Act* and with the financial support of the SBA, we can start to level the playing field for these individuals.

In our experience, returning citizens who take advantage of programs like ours are passionate about a fresh start, and also about creating opportunities not only for themselves but for others. Take, for example, the case of DeVaughn Bell, one of our current Pivot Program Fellows. DeVaughn had some prior experience in fast food and now wants to create a Halal-based catering business. He had been gaining recognition (and words of encouragement) from the DC Dept of Small and Local Business and the DC Dept of Employment Services, but simply did not know how to get his business off the ground – and found it very difficult to obtain the level of financial support he needed to do it well.

Through our program, he has been taking courses in business management with Georgetown faculty, while also working two days a week as an intern with a restaurant incubator called Prequel DC (to whom he was introduced by the Georgetown entrepreneurship community). For him, the opportunity to see the business from the perspective of the owner, not just a server or cook, has given him a whole new perspective. DeVaughn will now have the opportunity to work from the Georgetown startup Venture Lab while he puts together a solid and compelling business plan. With a bit of funding and continued guidance, we are very optimistic about his chances for success.

Legislation like the NEW START Act allows us to make good on our promise to provide returning citizens with a meaningful second chance. It is hard to overstate the hurdles that these people face; Georgetown urges Congress to pass the NEW START Act, which will give returning citizens a greater chance to thrive and to become contributing members of our communities.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alyssa Lovegrove".

Alyssa Lovegrove  
Teaching Professor, Georgetown University McDonough School of Business  
Academic Director, Georgetown Pivot Program