

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-0533**

Charles E. Samuels, Jr.  
Federal Bureau of Prisons  
320 First St., NW  
Washington, DC 20534

November 2, 2015

Dear Director Samuels,

America's criminal justice system is at a critical juncture. Currently, more adults are incarcerated than ever before in our nation's history. Since the early 1980s, the federal prison population has increased by approximately 800 percent. In 2013, 36 percent of federal prisons were over capacity. Recidivism is also rampant; in a study ranging from 2005 to 2010, the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that three in four former inmates were arrested within five years of release.[1] At the same time, federal funding for the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) has increased from \$3.7 billion in 2011 to \$6.4 billion in 2013. This growth in spending is not sustainable and we need to find better ways to address these chronic problems.

Arts education in prisons has a history of proven successes. For example, for many years, California's Arts-in-Corrections (AIC) program was the largest state-wide prison arts programs in the nation, and proved to be an effective and cost-efficient way to rehabilitate prisoners. Though the program was phased out after 2003, some arts programs continued their work in the California Correctional system using private donations. These artists, including a group whose work some of us have witnessed, The Actors' Gang, run by Oscar winning actor Tim Robbins, have lobbied for years to reinstate funding for Arts in Corrections. Recently, The Actors' Gang, together with the California Arts Council and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, has revived the program, bringing visual, performing, literary, media, and fine craft disciplines to California correctional institutions.

A study from 1983 showed that AIC cost the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation \$162,790, and brought \$228,522 in measurable social benefits, including \$105,406 benefits to taxpayers and \$123,116 in individual benefits.[2] Another study from 2013 at the Penitentiary of New Mexico revealed that implementing the *Prison English Program*, which focused on creative writing, drama, literature, and poetry, saved the New Mexico Corrections Department between \$27,000 and \$40,500 per semester.[3]

Over the years, the AIC program has proven to be an effective and cost efficient program with measurable benefits, including:

- **Improved behavior** among inmates: 75 percent of AIC participants at the California Medical Facility and 80.6 percent of those at the Correctional Training Facility having fewer disciplinary infractions compared with non-participants.
- **Fewer disciplinary actions:** 36 percent of participants at the California Medical Facility and 65.7 percent of those at the Correctional Training Facility had fewer disciplinary actions while participating in the program.[4]
- **Cost Savings:** The reduction in disciplinary actions produced \$77,406 in cost savings and reduced disciplinary administration time by 4,553 hours.[5]
- **Reduced Recidivism:** A study measuring the outcomes of parolees in California showed that six months after parole, AIC participants had an 88 percent favorable outcome rate. The differences become more notable over time. One year after parole, the favorable outcome for AIC participants was 74.2 percent in comparison to 49.6 percent for all parolees, and after two years the favorable outcome for AIC participants versus all parolees was 69.2 percent compared to 42 percent.[6] Participants in AIC reported increased self-discipline, self-esteem, self-respect, sense of purpose, and reconnection with family as a result of the program. Participants also reported reduced racial tension in the correctional facility. The study further found that 58 percent of arts-program participants said art brought them closer to family, enriched their conversations, and nurtured a new identity as artist rather than convict.

The California Institution for Women hosts an arts program taught by the Actors' Gang, called the Prison Project, which is in four California state prisons, increasing to six by February 2016. Prison Project's goals include reducing recidivism and in-prison violence and also increasing self-esteem and developing better emotional and social skills. A Captain with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation said the following about the prison arts program: *"I have seen a real change in the Inmates since they started the program with The Actors' Gang. They aren't as ready to snap. They used to get real excited and now they seem very in touch with how they are feeling. They seem to be experiencing more patience with themselves and with the other inmates. We are starting to see more empathy amongst the other Inmates as well."*

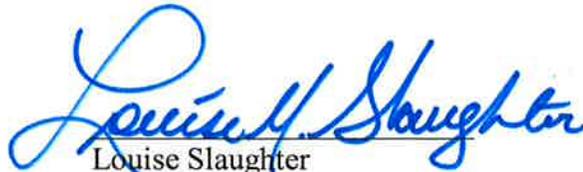
Despite these impressive results, there are too few of these programs in our prison system. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) is currently supporting, in partnership with BOP, programs in six federal prisons. While a worthwhile effort, these comprise only four percent of the federal prisons nationwide. Arts education and arts engagement in prisons saves taxpayer dollars, decreases recidivism, and makes stronger individuals who will be more successful when they re-enter society. At a time when prisons are consuming an ever-increasing part of the federal budget, we strongly urge you to expand art programs to more prisons. By making art

programs a priority, I encourage you to streamline the security process and other trainings to introduce more art teachers into the prison system, encourage and support prison directors to utilize art programs, work with local art agencies, state art agencies, and the NEA to identify qualified teaching artists. We also invite you to observe one of the successful arts programs happening across the country, such as at the California Institution for Women.

Sincerely,



Ted W. Lieu  
Member of Congress



Louise Slaughter  
Member of Congress



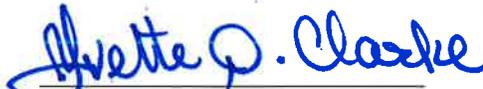
Rick Larsen  
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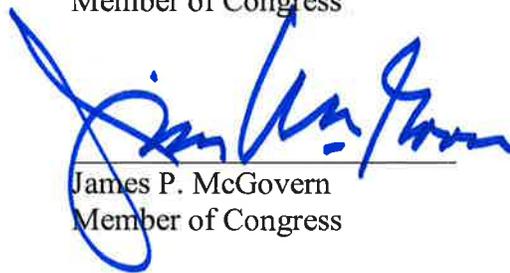
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Henry "Hank" Johnson  
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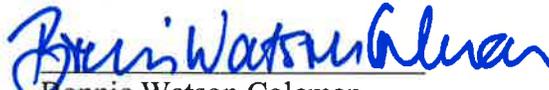
Betty McCollum  
Member of Congress



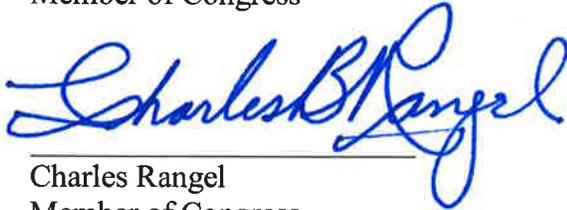
Mark Takano  
Member of Congress



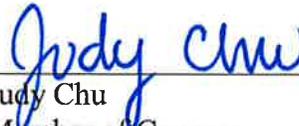
Mike Honda  
Member of Congress



Bonnie Watson Coleman  
Member of Congress



Charles Rangel  
Member of Congress



Judy Chu  
Member of Congress



Hakeem Jeffries  
Member of Congress



Zoe Lofgren  
Member of Congress

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[1] Durose, Matthew R., Alexia D. Cooper, and Howard N. Snyder, *Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 30 States in 2005: Patterns from 2005 to 2010* (pdf, 31 pages), Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, April 2014, NCJ 244205.

[2] Brewster, L. (1983). An Evaluation of the Arts-in-Corrections Program of the California Department of Corrections. Santa Cruz, CA: William James Association.

[3] Arizona State University College of Liberal Arts & Sciences (2013). Calculating Impact: doing the numbers. *Prison English News*, 1(1), 2.

[4] Brewster, L. (1983).

[5] *Id.*

[6] California Department of Corrections. (n.d.). Arts-in-Corrections Research Synopsis on Parole Outcomes for Participants Paroled December 1980-February 1987. Santa Cruz, CA: William James Association Prison Arts Program. Retrieved from:[http://www.williamjamesassociation.org/reports/CDC-AIC\\_recitivism\\_research\\_synopsis.pdf](http://www.williamjamesassociation.org/reports/CDC-AIC_recitivism_research_synopsis.pdf).