



DISABILITYRIGHTSDC

Jail and Prison Advocacy Project

Newsletter

JPAP celebrates 15 years in 2022!

In this month's newsletter:

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John Has a New Home

John, who has been living in a homeless shelter since he was released in November, just moved into his own apartment less than two weeks ago. While finding permanent housing typically takes more than a year, John's case worker was able to expedite the process after finding out that he was a veteran. She connected him with a veteran-focused contact, who, after verifying John's DD 214 (Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty), was able to move John into his own place in less than two and a half months!



When asked about what he is most excited about, John expressed enthusiasm for the future. While incarcerated, John participated in a job training program. With this experience under his belt, he now hopes to go back to school for Medical Coding. John's goal is to successfully complete and graduate from a

coding program in the next year.

This past week, our Reentry Advocate Robert Davis delivered to John some donated pieces of furniture, including a donated mattress and couch. Our Peer Navigator, Andre Gray, was able to find John a free television on Facebook Marketplace. John is looking forward to relaxing on his new couch and listening to his favorite genres of music on the donated radio – country, rap, and R&B. This week, Robert will take John shopping for essentials, such as a broom, blanket, and shower curtain. Robert will also help John obtain additional furniture from community-based nonprofits.

The support you provide makes it possible for us to provide our clients with everyday essentials, like cooking implements for John's new apartment.

[Donate](#)

Staff Member Spotlight: Robert Davis

Robert Davis started working for JPAP in March 2021 and is getting ready to celebrate his one-year work anniversary. In his role as a Reentry Advocate, Robert ensures that returning citizens have access to the resources necessary for them to succeed within the community, including mental health services, housing, and health insurance.



As a formerly incarcerated individual, Robert is familiar with what he refers to as, “the other side.” He realizes that incarceration and reentry each come with a unique set of priorities. When incarcerated, Robert knows that individuals are primarily focused on staying safe and keeping busy. Later, when they’re released, these individuals are overloaded with new responsibilities, including paying bills, acquiring food, and finding reliable transportation. Since he has experienced this transition firsthand, Robert acknowledges the apprehension and fear that often emerge when an incarcerated individual is told they are going home and uses this knowledge to guide his JPAP work.

During the day, Robert remains in constant contact with JPAP’s clients. When he first starts working with a client, he takes the time to identify that individual’s reentry goals, whether it be securing employment or finding a safe place to live. After that initial conversation, he brainstorms accommodations and services that align with the returning citizen’s goals and works hard with them to check each goal off their list. He is guided by his mission to “stand up and fight for the rights of those with disabilities” and teach them how to advocate for themselves. Robert is determined to help every JPAP client create their own success story.

When asked about his favorite part of the job, Robert emphasized that he is

thankful for the sheer number of resources that JPAP can provide to their clients. He recalls that when he was first released to a halfway house, he did not have many essential items and had to make calls himself to gather clothes, a Metro card, and other necessities. Now, with JPAP's resources, he can easily provide clients with many of these necessities by simply handing them a Safe and Smart bag or accompanying them on a shopping trip with funds provided by foundations and individual donors.

Even though he is the newest member of the JPAP team, Robert has already developed meaningful relationships with JPAP's clients and the other members of the team over the past year. When asked to reflect on his first year, Robert explained that JPAP "allows me to be me." Not only did the team accept him with open arms during his job interview more than a year ago, but he is now able to continue the work he has been passionate about since his own release, with the structure and support that the JPAP team offers.

Policy Updates

DRDC has been working on several systemic issues, ensuring that the needs of people with psychiatric and intellectual disabilities are addressed in larger criminal legal system reform efforts.

Examples of systemic issues DRDC is working on:



Parole Reform

Because of the advocacy of DRDC and others, the US Parole Commission (USPC) will cease operations in November 2022. Advocates were having great difficulty getting the city to create something else to take the USPC's place. Finally, the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice asked Olinda Moyd, the retired Director of PDS' Parole Division, to organize an advisory council to draft proposals for Mayor Bowser's consideration.

About six years ago, Tammy and Olinda had formed the first coalition in years to address parole reform. Because of that work, Olinda invited Tammy to join the new advisory council, as well as Robert Davis, one of JPAP's Reentry Advocates who is also a formerly incarcerated individual. As part of the advisory council, Tammy and Robert have reviewed proposals to replace the the USPC.

DRDC's priorities include building rehabilitation into the parole board's mission and ensuring that no one is incarcerated for a violation where no new crime was committed. The USPC has been particularly punitive, especially for people diagnosed with serious mental illness.

Jail Reform

DRDC has been very involved in the recent revelation about jail conditions as described by the US Marshal Service, as well as conditions at the jail due to COVID-19 and the Omicron surge. DRDC has been monitoring the safe cells and acute mental health unit at the jail for years, identifying problems to DOC

and achieving some changes. (See [here](#) for quotes by DRDC's Natasha Walls Smith). For example, when DRDC noted that DOC was using regular cells as unofficial safe cells—cells that had bunk beds and other places where individuals could hang or otherwise hurt themselves—DOC renovated cells in the acute mental health unit to be used as official safe cells. Other issues we have raised, such as not providing people in safe cells with out of cell time and regular showers, have persisted when we are not present to demand they be addressed immediately. We have formed a coalition with former members of the DC Jails and Justice Task Force to advocate for the city to decrease the census at the jail so there is more room for social distancing, as well as other changes to address the conditions at the jail. DRDC is advocating for community investments that would prevent people from entering the correctional system in the first place. Black DC residents and those with disabilities are grossly overrepresented at the DC Jail, a legacy of systemic racism that persists today.

Department of Corrections Oversight Hearing

The Committee on the Judiciary & Public Safety held a Performance Oversight Hearing on Wednesday, March 2, regarding the Department of Corrections. Natasha Walls Smith, DRDC's Mitigation and Monitoring Attorney, submitted written testimony prior to the hearing to be included in the official record and also delivered oral testimony during the live hearing.



Under the authority of DRDC, the protection and advocacy agency for DC, Natasha has unaccompanied access to the D.C. Jail to monitor the conditions of confinement for people with psychiatric and intellectual disabilities. While monitoring recently, she observed the indiscriminate implementation of safe cells (suicide prevention cells) for "treatment" purposes, a number of unsafe and unhygienic conditions and practices, and an ineffective grievance procedure on the acute mental health unit that violates constitutionally protected rights. She raised all of these concerns in both her written and oral testimony.

In February, Natasha and Tammy Seltzer met with DOC Director, Tom Faust, who was recently appointed to address many problems at the jail. In a two and a half hour meeting, they discussed the issues that Natasha had observed during her visit. Director Faust has committed to regular meetings with DRDC to discuss conditions in the jail's acute mental health unit and safe cells.

Where Does Your Donation Go?

We cannot do the work we do without help from our supporters. Any amount can make a major difference for every client. Here are a few ways that your donations can help to support our clients:

Donation Amount	Where Does Your Donation Go?
\$11	10 Metrobus Tokens
\$20	Pack of 60 KN95 Masks (for our Safe and Smart Kits)
\$35	30-day phone plan (includes data, talk, text)
\$50	Gift Card (Giant, Target, Walmart, etc.)
\$250	Shopping Trip for New Home Essentials

Donate

Thank you for your continued support!

University Legal Services | 220 I Street, NE, Suite 130, Washington, DC 20002

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