



June 25th, 2015

President Barack Obama
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue Northwest
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

I write to you as a national leader, criminal justice reform advocate, and founder of JustLeadershipUSA, a bold new organization dedicated to cutting the US correctional population in half by 2030 on the guiding principle that *those closest to the problem are closest to the solution*. Recently, I had the honor of participating in a strategic planning initiative that addressed both the intersection of, and possible remedies to, the issues of gun violence, policing, and mass incarceration in the United States. On Wednesday, June 17, 2015, George Washington University Law School served as host to a select group of civil rights and religious leaders, scholars, elected officials, law enforcement officials and foundation officers brought together by The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies and The Joyce Foundation.

Our day culminated with an invitation to join members of your domestic policy staff in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building for a discussion about their work on these issues. **A day of thoughtful and inspired dialogue, however, quickly turned into one of needless humiliation and stigma for me.** As each of my colleagues received green passes granting them immediate access, I received a pink ID bearing the label: "Needs Escort." **Its inspiration was quickly and unsurprisingly confirmed: anyone with a criminal conviction requires an escort at all times on the White House grounds.** The staggering symbolism of the ordeal was not lost on me, Mr. President. In a country where 65 million people have a criminal record on file, being selectively barred from entering the White House for a discussion about those very same people was as insulting as it was indicative of the broader problem.

Along with millions of others, I have watched with tremendous pride and optimism as your administration has stated that our carceral policies are patently counterproductive. Further, those policies disproportionately target communities of color, running roughshod over our declared principles of justice, fairness, and proportionality in the process. **I submit to you that the**

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treatment I received as an invited White House guest, and by extension all others with prior convictions, further erodes the life of those principles. In your letters of commutation you have concluded, “Remember that you have the capacity to make good choices. By doing so, you will affect not only your own life, but those close to you. You will also influence, through your example, the possibility that others in your circumstances get their own second chance in the future.” This counsel is as applicable to our nation’s corridors of power as it is to our most travailed citizens. The work of the mature democracy is to organize itself in such a way that best enables that process without undue hardship.

Along my journey to national advocacy, I’ve disabused myself of several of our national delusions, the most poignant being the myth of the voiceless masses who require the spokespersonship of a noble and courageous few. **I never met any of the alleged voiceless during my incarceration, only the deliberately silenced. In the corridors of our nation’s highest office, I found my voice and my person restricted in an agonizingly similar way to that which I encountered in prison.** Rather than being debilitated, I walked away further emboldened and hopeful that when guided by a commitment to justice, power might listen.

There is strong evidence to believe that is the case. In your March interview with David Simon you stated rightfully: “Part of the challenge is going to be making sure, number one, that we humanize what so often on the local news is just a bunch of shadowy characters and tell their stories.” There is no expression capable of fully capturing how uplifting these remarks are for millions of our country’s men and women. In the spirit of that conviction, I humbly request a meeting with myself and a select group of other formerly incarcerated leaders at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,



Glenn E. Martin
Founder and President
JustLeadershipUSA

CC:

Joseph P. Clancy, Director, United States Secret Service

Spencer Overton, President, The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies

Ellen Alberding, President, The Joyce Foundation