



Response to Downtown Ward 7 Urban Park Eminent Domain Authority Emergency Declaration Resolution of 2021

The DC Reentry Action Network (RAN) is a coalition of nonprofit organizations that provide direct reentry-specific services to the District of Columbia (DC) justice-involved and returned citizen residents. RAN strives to ensure that all justice-involved people in DC have access to high-quality reentry services to support their successful reintegration and promote community-based alternatives to end DC's over-reliance on the criminal justice system. RAN's 30-member community-based organizations are on the frontlines every day, providing direct transitional reentry supportive services to assist the thousands of individuals returning home to DC from jail and prison. RAN is the leader in reentry service delivery for our justice-involved citizens. Thus, we have earned the authority to illuminate any harmful efforts underway to dismantle our returning citizens' effective reintegration.

The proposition of emergency measures to claim the land slated for the new halfway house in DC for use as an urban park is an injudicious and reckless attempt to derail an essential service to the community.

In this era of social justice reform and conscious dismantling of racially biased systems, the consistent efforts to obstruct the opening of the only residential reentry facility for men in DC is irresponsible.

The critical need for a facility to house, educate, and support men returning home after incarceration is no longer an arguable strategy for successful reentry and reintegration. Statistics uphold the benefits of effective residential reentry programs, including reduced recidivism, development of pro-social worldviews and positive community relationships, and connections to viable employment. This facility is an indispensable component in the city's overall reentry structure to help people rebuild their lives and ensure that returning citizens can become contributing members of their community.

RAN recognizes the importance of serving DC residents at a halfway house located in DC, not in the surrounding jurisdictions. This unique group of returning citizens has often been housed hundreds, if not thousands, of miles away from their loved ones in Federal Bureau of Prison (BOP) facilities, disconnected from their support systems, and DC's resources. By opening a new halfway house in DC, as opposed to Maryland or Virginia, the BOP ensures a more effective continuum of care for DC's returning citizens and facilitates family reunification.

Research and experience also tell us that connectedness to the community is a predictor for recidivism; when individuals return home, their ability to make positive life changes is tied to their sense of belonging, connectedness, and identity in the community. Many individuals returning home to DC from the BOP originate from Wards East of the River. This fact makes the facility's placement in Ward 7 imperative because this is home or near home for many of the individuals returning. The opportunity to come home and be supported in their community is a necessary element for returning citizens to create new lives and to exercise their self-determination.

We believe that an outlook that prioritizes a park over housing and the strategic development of crucial post-incarceration reentry efforts, particularly in communities so profoundly impacted by mass incarceration, is incredibly shortsighted. We recognize the measurable benefits a park brings to a community. But, we are also critically aware that men who have had a chance to successfully re-establish their lives, connections, and livelihoods bring an incalculable value to their communities. To

deny 300 DC residents the structured opportunity to reintegrate productively does not support DC's values to provide equitable liberties to all residents.

*"In Washington, DC, we value diversity and inclusivity and want **all** of our residents and visitors to feel safe. No matter your race, your faith, your sexual orientation, your gender identity, your **background** – you should be able to live, work and play in Washington, DC without fear of violence or **discrimination**," - Mayor Bowser, March 10, 2017.*

An urban park is an amenity. Providing housing for our most vulnerable is a priority. The entire city ultimately reaps the benefits when we work to serve those most in need of support. The residents of DC, which includes returning citizens and their families, deserve a chance to restore their lives, in their communities, with the resources necessary to create meaningful change. Standing in opposition to the provision of these opportunities is a denigration of DC's stated principles and values of accessibility, diversity, equity, livability, opportunity, prosperity, resilience, and safety.



To learn more about RAN, please visit our website at www.dc-ran.org.

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