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before the

Subcommittee on Crime
of the House Committee of the Judiciary

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and the

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of the House Committee on Education and Labor

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Does the Devil make work for idle hands? Is a job an antidote to crime? Always? Ever? **Does** it matter what kind of job it is? Are some kinds of crime easier than others to control through an employment strategy? There are, as I will try to suggest, various relationships between employment and crime. Some of these relationships are obvious, but not as powerful as commonly thought; others are complex but, it appears to us, more important. All of them suggest that a crime control policy that fails to take account of employment variables will miss the mark. From my perspective, therefore, these joint hearings are important, and I am grateful for this opportunity to appear before you.

Let me explain briefly the nature of the Vera Institute's involvement in this field; we conduct action programs to test direct crime-averting effects of employment and we study the vital but indirect social and cultural factors that affect both criminality and employment. Our current course of research on relationships between employment and

crime, sponsored by the Research Agreements Program of the National Institute of Justice, got underway in 1977. In addition to publication of Employment and Crime: A Review of Theories and Research, which has been shared with interested members of the committee staffs, we are pursuing two research strategies. First, for a sample of 900 Brooklyn Criminal Court defendants, we have been collecting detailed information on employment and arrest history. Second, in three "high-risk" Brooklyn neighborhoods, we have fielded ethnographic researchers to make an intimate study, over eighteen months, of the development of criminal and of legitimate lifestyles among the youth there. From this effort, we hope to construct a model of employment and crime that accounts for youths' simultaneous exploration of both illegal and legal opportunities and that accounts for the widespread lessening of street crime as youths move from their late teens to their early and mid-twenties. To understand these phenomena better, and to ground our understanding in empirical study of this kind, should make it possible to devise more effective policies and programs for taking advantage of the crime-averting potential of employment.

This is of considerable importance to Vera, because our programmatic efforts in this field stretch back to 1961 and continue today. Vera, in the Manhattan Bail Project, was among the first to recognize the relevance of employment

history and current job status to the pre-trial release or detention of persons accused of crime and to incorporate that element into a system for identifying the better risks for release on recognisance. In 1967, we designed and launched one of the two initial criminal case diversion programs, in which vocational development and employment services were made available to selected cases diverted from criminal process. In 1972, we designed (and later evaluated) the first supported work program for ex-addicts and ex-offenders, the Wildcat Services Corporation. We are presently operating a large employment program tailored to the immediate post-release income needs of persons returning to New York City from federal, state and local prisons and jails. And we are presently conducting a research and demonstration project, with funding from the Department of Labor, designed to assess the impact of different employment program models on the earnings, labor market experiences and criminal justice involvement of out-of-school, unemployed 16-to 21-year-old youth in New York, in Liberty City, Miami, and in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Our own efforts to aim effective employment programs at high-risk populations, and the efforts inspired by statutes born here, have -- I think -- been[^] poorly served by persistent oversimplification of the relationships that actually exist between employment and crime. Not only have the oversimplifications distorted the content and techniques of

employment programs, but they have encouraged unrealistic expectations about programs and expenditures in both the manpower and crime control fields. Profound disappointment and policy confusion have now inspired a general flight from the idea that expanding the economic opportunities for the poor is essential to our effort to reduce crime. Increasingly, federal and state strategies for crime control emphasize deterrence through punishment and exclude jobs and economic development. Although my remarks today will focus on the complexity of the employment variables, before I conclude I will return to the deterrence-through-punishment strategy because it, too, rests on an oversimplified view of human behavior; the oversimplifications and unrealistic expectations for deterrence are quite similar to those on the employment side, and they are likely to lead, after substantial expenditure on increasing the punitive capacity of our criminal justice systems, to the same kind of disappointment and policy confusion.

I. Employment and Crime: Assumptions and Oversimplifications

I will speak of relationships between "employment" and crime rather than of the narrower set of relationships between "unemployment" and crime. I do this to emphasize our belief that the policy is too narrow, takes too little advantage of the crime-averting potential of employment, if it rests on an assumption that any sort of employment will have an impact (or the same impact) on all those whose criminal behavior might be curtailed by participation in the labor market. Similarly, I will speak of direct relationships between employment and crime, and of indirect relationships.

A direct relationship exists if crime and employment operate as different and competing sources of income -- more of the latter should result in less of the former. The simple notion is that the individual trades off the two income-generating activities, depending on how their relative benefits appear to him. That the notion is simple does not mean it is wrong. It seems to explain the behavior of some individuals, and evidence of this relationship can be found in various places. For example, the District of Columbia Bail Agency reports that 46% of persons prosecuted in 1975 were unemployed, compared to a District-wide rate of 7.6%. Studies linking unemployment rates and crime rates at a national or regional level often find a correlation between the two rates. Employment programs serving ex-offenders have also often found this direct link. In the Transitional

Aid to Released Prisoners experiment (TARP), increased employment was found to be strongly associated with lowered property and non-property crime. Similar findings emerged from the Vera Institute's evaluation of the original supported work experiment. At the individual level, from the field interviews conducted by our ethnographic researchers, subjects have consistently described ways in which their employment experiences have affected their criminal behavior, and vice-versa.

Without attempting to deny the importance of direct links between labor market participation and reduction of crime, I want to emphasize the myriad indirect relationships; crime arises from and is sensitive to many factors and processes which are, in turn, influenced by employment variables. These indirect relationships include the impact of eroding economic opportunities on the whole range of institutions that shape individual behavior: family life, schooling, neighborhood stability. For example, improved employment opportunities and examples of successful labor market participation may directly affect the age at which "high-risk" males form families, and the stability (economic and otherwise) of the families they form; the stability of the family, in turn, affects the type and frequency of criminal behavior. In a process such as this, enhanced employment contributes to reduced criminality, but not through a direct, income-tradeoff effect.

II. Direct and Indirect Relationships between Employment and Crime

Perhaps the strongest support for the notion of a direct and unambiguous link between employment and crime comes from the very high level of unemployment among the nation's incarcerated offenders. These rates of unemployment -- ranging between 40 and 60 percent at the time of the offense -- show, at least, severe problems in the labor market. But even at this level, there is complexity. In pilot interviews with jailed misdemeanants, conducted by Vera about three years ago, we discovered a multitude of ties between employment experiences and criminality. Some offenders shifted the type and frequency of their crime depending on whether or not they were working. During periods of employment, they would commit less time-consuming crimes, or fewer income-generating crimes. Some offenders appeared to use a job as a "cover" in order to lessen police suspicion concerning their activities: for example, drug dealers are more easily able to explain large amounts of cash in their pockets if they can point to employment. Some offenders used employers as the chief victims for their crimes, stealing from the job and in some cases carrying on gambling and drug schemes at the work site.

Of course, many offenders illustrated the simple, direct relationship between employment and crime: they engaged in crime after loss of a job or after failure to locate and secure satisfactory employment.

But our report of their interviews and other research also disclose a host of non-employment variables that contributed in indirect ways both to the employment difficulties and to the criminal behavior. The quantity and quality of jobs available to various groups living together in local neighborhoods influence the ways that people form households, regulate public behavior, and use public services such as schools, welfare, police, and social programs. The resulting neighborhood atmosphere shapes the incentives for residents to engage or not engage in income-oriented crime.

In our research in several of New York's neighborhoods, we have found quite distinct relationships between crime and employment in different locales. One group of young men whom we have studied, now about twenty years old, grew up together in one of these neighborhoods. They are superficially alike, in that all are school dropouts who have suffered substantial unemployment; and each has committed numerous burglaries and robberies. Most have been arrested, have experienced short periods of incarceration, and are now on probation. But now consider these differences:

- After he was arrested for the first time, one young man got his first job when his father took him to work in the restaurant where the father had washed dishes for over twenty years. He next worked for nearly a year, his longest job, in a demolition program sponsored by a community agency. The program, however, was able to place fewer than five percent of its participants in the private sector by the time it ended. He has been only sporadically employed since then, though he had good manual

skills and has consistently sought work. He still lives with his parents. His girlfriend is in school taking secretarial courses that appear to promise her ample future employment opportunity. He still commits an occasional crime but is much less active than previously.

- Another individual was an active car thief for about a year until arrested and placed on probation. He dropped out of school at sixteen to work in a factory and pay off family debts. He lives with his mother who receives disability payments. He currently works at a maintenance job and has recently enrolled in a night school automotive program. He no longer steals cars but does operate as a middle man in the neighborhood's busy but loosely organized auto theft networks. His career goal is to become a licensed auto mechanic.
- Still another member of this group has been criminally inactive since he was put on probation at eighteen. In order to get probation, he took a job in a factory to demonstrate employment to the sentencing judge. He remained at that job for six months, during which time he lived with a woman on welfare and her child. Prior to the factory job his only employment had been provided by a community employment program. He has since moved back in with his parents and has had a series of office jobs of short duration.
- Another, who has never been arrested, actually supported a woman and child for a few months with income from robbery and burglary. He now works in a factory and lives by himself. His current crimes are relatively petty on-the-job thefts.

These short case summaries show that many factors influence an individual's needs for income and his opportunities to gain income by engaging in employment or in crime. Both the criminal justice system and employment programs played a significant role in controlling the criminal activity of this group, but family connections to jobs, the school

system's apparent ability to provide better links to the labor market for females than for males, local markets for stolen goods, the desire to seek occasional or steady income depending on family status and school involvements, and other factors in the local environment also have played important roles.

III. Understanding the Relationships

What main factors can we isolate to make sense of these direct and indirect employment and crime relationships? And how do these factors better inform our search for effective public policy? I want to discuss three important factors: age, labor market structure, and the income-seeking strategies of underemployed people.

Our more recent research indicates that the various linkages between crime and employment bear a strong relationship to age. For example, teenage car thieves may quit stealing and turn to stripping and marketing of stolen auto parts as they get older. There is general moderation in frequency and severity of crimes with increasing age, although the causal relationship between age, crime and social stability are imperfectly understood. For many, criminal activity ceases altogether by the mid-twenties.

Age is also an important factor in employment. Labor market behavior changes dramatically from age 15 to age 24. Younger workers are often in what Paul Osterman of Boston University has called a "moratorium" labor market state. Work is exploratory and somewhat sporadic. Younger workers tend to be "target earners," aiming at a particular short-term target income rather than a steady long-term income stream. The quality of the jobs available to young workers reflects and reinforces this "moratorium." Firms employing youth offer jobs that are generally low paying and short term, without substantial promise of later upward mobility. The

nature of youth jobs is in part accounted for by the preferences and behavior of youths themselves. But employers also manifest preferences not to hire very young workers, further limiting their opportunities.

The issue of job quality raises a second critical dimension, in addition to age. Some labor economists have described a "dual" or "segmented" labor market consisting of "primary" jobs, which have good pay, prospects for advancement, benefits and stability, and "secondary" jobs, which are low-paying, unskilled, and dead-end. It is these secondary jobs which are expanding in the U.S. economy.

Changes in the U.S. labor market during the 1970's highlight this problem. The employment expansion of the 1970's was concentrated in sectors which have minimal skill requirements, unstable hours, few prospects for advancement and low pay. For example, McDonald's now employs almost two and one-half times as many workers as U.S. Steel. Entry level blue collar manufacturing jobs are disappearing from the economy, especially in older urban areas such as New York. The suburbanization of employment also adds to the problems of inner city male youth. And many of the new urban jobs are held mainly by women, concentrated in sectors such as health care, food service, clerical work and cleaning.

So at a time when there are more unemployed young males -- especially minorities -- in declining urban areas, the traditional labor market routes used by their fathers or older brothers are contracting. Policies which continue to view

their employment problem as no more than a difficulty in obtaining some sort of job are ignoring these important structural changes. Many underemployed youth work at secondary jobs, although they often face stiff competition for them. But changes in overall job structure make it less likely that these jobs will lead to stable employment careers even for those who secure them.

The final factor to be emphasized is the role of non-employment income strategies. Many of the urban poor supplement low-paying secondary employment with a variety of other income sources: government transfers, support from family and friends, off-the-books labor, barter and crime. A strict dichotomy between unemployment and employment may be misleading. We should instead focus on underemployment, and how people actually cope with the world of intermittent, low-paying secondary employment, if we hope to understand the variety of employment and crime relationships.

Thus, research on poor urban neighborhoods reveals employment to be but one element in the income stream of many households. The injection of a few low-level, temporary jobs into such a community is unlikely to transform this structure of opportunities, though some individuals can diminish their reliance on criminal income. This mix of income strategies affects and is affected by such factors as patterns of staying in school, household formation and neighborhood stability. In short, a whole host of factors, some only indirectly related to employment and crime, affect

and are affected by underemployment. These broader social factors in turn have important impacts on both employment and crime, beyond simply affecting a trade-off between crime and employment as sources of income.

IV. Understanding the Evidence from Employment Programs

Given this variety of direct and indirect relationships between employment and crime, and the diverse impacts of age, labor market structure and mixed income strategies, it is not surprising that when employment programs for crime-prone groups are evaluated, the results are ambiguous with respect to impact on arrest rates.

In addition to the confounding variables affecting employment-crime relationships for participants in employment programs, sketched above, we should emphasize that many employment program evaluations show no impact on crime because they show no impact on employment. Where the hypothesis is that entry into and retention in the labor market will reduce crime, it is not surprising to find recidivism unaffected when the target group fails to get jobs or to retain them. While we have precious little evidence from these program evaluations that the programs have materially affected crime, it is clearly invalid to infer from these results that improved employment experiences (if the programs could achieve that) would not reduce the incidence of criminal behavior.

The effectiveness of employment programs for participants depends heavily on individual, social and structural economic factors. This suggests that, in the future, a better matching of programs to specific population groups and conditions of the local economy could lead to increased program effectiveness. For example, about half of property arrests are of male youths, 15 to 19 years of age. Since this is a group that is or ought

to be heavily involved in schooling and which is tied to the income flow of the parental household, their employment and income needs differ markedly from those of older people seeking employment in order to support their own households.

Programs for this young, high-crime committing group should perhaps not be judged on their ability to provide full-time stable employment. Part-time work that does not compete with schooling but provides an income alternative to crime and serves as part of a long-range socialization into the labor market might be a more realistic program goal for this group. Recent evidence from evaluations of the Department of Labor's Youth Incentives Entitlement efforts points to promising results from using part-time employment to motivate school-age youths to remain in or return to school.

On the other hand, a temporary part-time program which is appropriate for school-age teens might not be appropriate for older workers and ex-offenders. In their mid to late 20's, most of this group has different income and employment needs from teenagers. Often removed from effective job networks, and carrying the stigma of a criminal record, this group might need direct links to primary job networks, perhaps emphasizing direct on-the-job training. Public service employment may be an important work sphere for this group. The national supported work demonstration has shown encouraging results for some hard-to-employ groups with high rates of arrest, such as ex-addicts.

There are important reasons for continuing to believe that expanded economic opportunities, including enhanced employment and earnings, should continue as a significant element in a crime control strategy. The very program evaluations that have produced mixed over-all results have also pointed to the strong association between employment (when it is secured) and reduced crime and recidivism. Participants who stay in programs have fewer arrests than those who drop out, and members of untreated control groups who find employment on their own have fewer arrests than those who do not work. In other words, employment programs may act like a "litmus test," identifying participants who can use the program's particular offer of work as a means for withdrawing from criminal behavior. These successful ones may make this lifestyle shift not just because of the monetary rewards of work secured in or through the program, but also because, as individuals, they have been able to harness their own motivation, support from family, available post-program job opportunities and other resources to build relatively stable labor market careers. The challenge facing us is to learn more about how employment opportunities can be improved through programmatic interventions and also how we can identify, magnify, and capitalize on the innate strengths and personal resources that participants bring to employment programs.

V. The Policy Challenge of Labor Market Trends

My belief that economic opportunities should continue as an important part of a crime control strategy does not lead me to think we can merely replicate the programs of the past. I think important changes are taking place in the labor market and the economy, changes that are producing new challenges for policy.

I have briefly touched on some of those changes, especially the growing proportion of jobs that are jobs of the "secondary" kind. While these jobs are growing as a proportion of all jobs, it must also be noted that the overall number of jobs available to the urban poor is seriously insufficient. Many of the new jobs are located outside of the decaying urban cores where many poor youth live. Also, the number of poor urban youth continues to grow, and their unemployment problems continue at historically high levels.

It is also important to recognize who creates new jobs. David Birch of M.I.T. points out that between 1969 and 1976, two-thirds of net new jobs in the American economy were created by firms with twenty or fewer employees. These small businesses are not likely to have extensive internal promotion ladders and job benefits and are much more prone to lay off workers. Small businesses have higher failure rates and lower profit margins, and do not provide many training opportunities or upwardly mobile jobs. These small employers are also harder to reach with traditional economic policies.

So both job quantity and quality are diminishing in cities, leading to more unstable labor market careers for young urban workers. Large numbers of poor youth compete for secondary jobs, and it is likely that some proportion, perhaps a growing proportion of these youth will be shut out of the labor market altogether. Manufacturing employment, a traditional labor market route for young urban males, is shrinking, making traditional job acquisition networks less useful -- these youth lack access to other networks which might lead to other forms of primary employment.

Thus, I foresee a persistent problem of underemployment for poor, urban male youth, precisely those most at risk of engaging in street crime. Since many of these economic trends -- secondary job creation, suburbanization of employment, small business volatility -- are tied to far-reaching changes in the private economy, it is unlikely that the private sector will solve these problems by itself. There will be a continued, if not a growing need, for government involvement in future policy efforts.

Because the labor market is changing, the formulation of future policy will require careful analysis of local labor markets and the development of strategies to address several areas of need. Among them are:

- The need to design programs, aimed at school-age youth, which supplement education instead of trying to place these youngsters into permanent adult labor market careers;

- The need to revitalize decaying central cities, for the dual purpose of providing employment and creating a climate where new business can arise and expand;
- The need to devise ways of more effectively linking small employers and the underemployed, since small employers create most new jobs;
- The need to enhance the noneconomic dimensions of employment, so that legitimate jobs will be more attractive and satisfying, increasing job retention;
- The need to augment stability for those in the secondary labor market, both to aid poor individuals and to help stabilize the communities and neighborhoods where they live.

I do not doubt that government will continue to be a necessary partner in developing and understanding policies and programs to expand and enhance employment for the urban poor within the context of these economic trends.

VI. The Pitfalls of Excessive Reliance on Deterrence through Punishment

The control of crime will require us to enhance the deterrent capacity of the criminal justice system even as we sharpen our policies and programs designed to improve the economic circumstances of the urban poor. However, we must acknowledge that the potential impact of a deterrence strategy grounded in punishment alone must be severely limited. Realizing the potential of deterrence is likely to prove just as difficult and at least as costly as our recent efforts to reduce crime directly through employment programs for those involved with the criminal justice system.

The current shift to the punishment side of the equation is neither a surprising nor a particularly radical shift in thought. Almost everyone agrees that human behavior is somehow responsive to rewards and punishments, incentives and disincentives. Indeed, that belief has supported the expectation that criminal behavior would decline if the economic experiences of the urban poor were improved. Policies and programs derived from this assumption have emphasized the reward or incentive side of the equation. It is not surprising that we would attempt to establish control by working the other side of the equation; that is, by increasing the certainty and severity of punishments.

Since we have already suffered through the consequences of oversimplifying the economic opportunity side of the equation, we should be careful not to re-create those consequences by accepting oversimplified assumptions and unrealistic

expectations on the deterrence side. For example, just as employment programs often fail to work any actual improvement in the labor market status of those at whom they are aimed, the police are not often able to arrest the individual whose recent robbery makes us anxious to have him punished. Clearance rates for most property offenses, and even for robbery are shockingly low; the risk of being apprehended for a particular predatory act is lower still. (Clearance rates, because they are built on data that credit a new arrest with the prior unsolved crimes attributable to the suspect, are not a fair measure of the risk of apprehension.)

With the risk of apprehension so very low, the punitive resources that we would have to build, if our punishments are going to influence many individual decisions to commit or not commit a street crime, are likely to be far in excess of current projections. This difficulty is compounded by the lack of opportunity cost of crime for the inner-city youth who lacks a stake in the future, who is unemployed and perceives no prospect of gain through employment. Those of us who generate reasoned policies for deterring crime do our own cost/benefit analysis to find evidence that it will work. Of course we fear punishment, even if the risk of apprehension is low. But we are not likely to risk our jobs or our income -- our stake in the legitimate life-style that is the source or supporting structure for most of our benefits. If we are to deter the street crime that so threatens us we would be

foolish, in my view, not to work hard to increase the benefits of non-crime to those among the urban, poor youth who at present perceive little to lose from crime. In my view, pursuit of an effective deterrence policy leads inexorably back to the need to develop and pursue employment strategies.

VII. Summary and Conclusion

I have identified several themes which I feel are essential to a fuller understanding of the relationships between economic status and street crime. Research of the past decade, whether based on aggregate statistics, results from employment programs, or direct observation, tempers our hopes for a direct and easily manipulable pattern relating crime and employment. Yet this tempered view does not hold that no relationship exists between economic status and crime; it argues instead that the relationships are various and are indirect as well as direct.

I have suggested that good policy and programs in this field requires us to examine the nature of the direct and the indirect links between employment opportunities and crime and to assess the quantity and quality of jobs in the labor market, the degree to which entry-level employment is linked to a future career-ladder, the social supports afforded employment in local neighborhoods, and the wage levels and duration of jobs available either in programs or after program participation.

Ambiguous results from labor market programs targetted at high-crime groups, taken as a whole, disguise important clues to more effective policy and program. Policy in the future will have to consider careful targeting of employment efforts, based on the age and criminal behavior of different populations, their social circumstances, including

family and school status, and the structure of labor markets in which they move. Mixed results from broadly conceived programs should encourage us to aim better, and should remind us to have realistic expectations about what programs can and cannot do.

But because program efforts show mixed results, and because manipulating employment and crime relationships to achieve policy objectives requires a richer and more detailed knowledge base, some people have drawn a false inference. They infer that program efforts cannot aid at all in crime reduction, or that there is no relationship between economic status and crime, or that a continued governmental role is unnecessary. These inferences are invalid, and I think they are demonstrably false. Mixed results do not equal no results; rich and complex relationships do not mean no relationship.

Very often, those who conclude that programs have failed suggest that deterrence efforts can substantially reduce crime. I have suggested that while attention should be given to enhancing the deterrent impact of the criminal justice system, we should be careful to avoid false and misleading assumptions about how that objective can be accomplished and at what cost, and we should not lose sight of the assist any deterrence strategy is likely to get from an improvement in the labor market prospects of those whose behavior we are trying to control.

I have cautioned against viewing employment strategies and the deterrence strategies as mutually exclusive. Not only are they rooted in the same model of human behavior and its responsiveness to rewards and punishments, but I believe a judicious mix of criminal justice reforms and better economic opportunities holds the best promise for helping to alleviate the crime problem. Although it is currently the fashion to downplay the importance of government participation, I see a continuing need for effective, carefully considered government policies aimed at employment and crime problems. This need is likely to grow, not diminish, in the next decade.