

Statement of Rita Gray
Public Hearing on Proposed 2025 Amendments – Supervised Release
March 13, 2025

Dear Members of the U.S. Sentencing Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the proposed amendments related to supervised release. My name is Rita Gray, and I currently serve as the Director of Operations at Life After Release, a grassroots, formerly incarcerated women-led organization based in Prince George's County, Maryland, And a Proud Member of the National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls. Also, the Executive Director and Founder of FOCUS (Females of Color United for Success). We work directly with individuals and families impacted by the criminal legal system, and much of our work focuses on the long-term harm caused by overly restrictive supervised release conditions and the ways these conditions undermine successful reentry.

As a formerly incarcerated Black woman, I do not come to you today as a policy expert sitting in a think tank; I come to you as someone who has lived the experience of trying to rebuild my life while entangled in the web of post-incarceration supervision. Supervised release is often framed as a tool of support and accountability, but for many people in our communities, it functions as an extension of punishment, creating a revolving door back into the system for minor technical violations rather than actual new offenses.

During my time on supervised release, I faced multiple barriers that hindered my efforts to rebuild my life. Despite demonstrating a commitment to education, employment, and family reunification, I encountered numerous setbacks because of excessive and unfair restrictions.

- I was denied travel to attend my daughter's college graduation, a significant moment of family reunification that was essential for strengthening our bond after years of separation.
- I lost several job opportunities due to the halfway house's restrictive policies, which directly impacted my ability to maintain stable employment — a key factor in successful reentry.
- I was also denied permission to attend my fellowship graduation, a program that was specifically designed to support my reentry efforts and personal development.

Additionally, I was misled regarding housing opportunities. I was repeatedly given permission to search for housing, only to be told that I could not secure a place in my name after being approved. I was also approved for transitional housing but informed that if I remained on home confinement when my transitional period ended, I would have to return to the halfway house or move back in with my mother — neither of which supported my independence or stability.

I hold a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) and faced further hardship when I was penalized for minor actions that stemmed from my demanding work schedule. After a 10-hour shift in a

location without Wi-Fi access, I missed an important exam. On my way home, I briefly stopped to pick up food — a necessary act after working long hours. The next day, I was informed that I faced disciplinary action. As punishment, I was prevented from attending church services and denied access to personal hygiene supplies — both critical aspects of my well-being and faith practice. Despite these challenges, I remained committed to my goals. I came home in 2021 and immediately enrolled at Catholic University as a full-time student. Over the next two years, I earned my Bachelor's degree in Management with a **3.83 GPA** while working **two jobs** to sustain myself.

I received a **10-year mandatory minimum sentence** for a **conspiracy drug offense** — my first and only felony. I had never been arrested or incarcerated before. Out of that 10-year sentence, I served **4 years, 6 months and 28 days** in prison, followed by **3 years and 2 months** and 4 days on home confinement.

My story reflects the harsh reality that overly restrictive supervised release conditions do not promote successful reentry — they create unnecessary obstacles that prevent individuals from moving forward. I urge the Commission to adopt amendments that prioritize access to community-based support, employment assistance, and mental health resources over punitive measures that undermine stability.

Real public safety comes from empowering individuals to rebuild their lives, not from excessive surveillance and punishment. I stand before you as living proof that resilience and determination can break through these barriers, but no one should have to fight this hard to reclaim their future.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Rita Gray