



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 28, 2008

Contact: Leah Gurowitz
202/879-1700 (Superior Court)
or Beverly Young
202/671-2135 (Department of Corrections)

D.C. Superior Court and D.C. Department of Corrections announce a pilot ‘courthouse release’ program

WASHINGTON, DC – The Superior Court of the District of Columbia (“the Court”) and D.C. Department of Corrections (DOC) today announced the upcoming implementation of a pilot ‘courthouse release’ program to begin this summer. The new program will reduce the number of defendants who must return to the D.C. Jail at the end of each court day, solely to be processed out. This, in turn, will allow the DOC to focus on processing other defendants more promptly and releasing them earlier in the day.

The pilot project, designed and implemented with the participation of the D.C. Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC), will involve the release *at the courthouse* of those accused of misdemeanors and traffic offenses who are ordered released by a judge. Current practice is to have such inmates – and the court order releasing them – conveyed back to the jail for processing. Historically, that has been seen as necessary to afford DOC records staff adequate opportunity to make sure there were no other charges, detainers or warrants before carrying out a release order in a particular case. During the pilot project, this processing will be done at the courthouse. This will enable a large number of defendants to be released sooner and allow DOC Records Office staff to focus on defendants with felony charges and other matters.

“This is a very welcome improvement. There are often a number of local and national records that need to be checked, but it makes good sense to do the checking at the courthouse and release people directly from the courthouse,” said Superior Court Chief Judge Rufus G. King III.

“I am highly pleased by the initiation of this project,” said Department of Corrections Director Devon Brown. “Not only will it improve coordination between the District of Columbia’s criminal justice partners, but better ensure that defendants are timely released when so ordered by the court.”

continued...

This pilot project is one of several improvements that the Court, U.S. Marshals Service (USMS) and DOC have made over the past several months to enhance the prompt release of defendants. These improvements include:

- The Court and DOC have both added additional staff to increase the efficiency of the release determination process.
- The Court has provided office space for several experienced DOC legal instrument examiners and they have been located at the courthouse since April 2008.
- These DOC examiners expedite appropriate documentation to the Records Office for release preparation and they are authorized to make the final determination to release a defendant.
- The Court has revised its forms to improve the accuracy of paperwork that will travel with the defendant.
- The Court changed its database to facilitate access to relevant case status information.
- DOC has assumed control of the Correctional Treatment Facility's Records Office in late December in an effort to streamline records processing and establish more effective accountability.

A recent study found a high degree of commitment from all three agencies who handle defendants in custody in DC (DOC, the Court and the USMS) and an excellent level of collaboration between the agencies. "I appreciate the support of the CJCC and Councilmember Mendelson," said Chief Judge King. "I want to commend the Department of Corrections and the Marshals Service, as well as Court's Criminal Division, for a true partnership. This pilot project has been possible through the best kind of cooperation among independent entities working together to improve the level of service to public."

#