



CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS  
WITH DISABILITIES

## **DISABILITY PREVENTION INITIATIVES IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM MAY FACILITATE SELF-SUFFICIENCY FOR THE VULNERABLE**

*There should be effective disability prevention initiatives in the criminal justice system for vulnerable people to prevent diminished health, which is a barrier to self-sufficient living in the community.*

A forum was held on the “Hip-Hop Theory of Justice” at the Center for American Progress. Presenters at the forum were a former prosecutor, an author of a book that analyzed the criminal justice system and a state attorney for Maryland. A Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist served as the moderator.

### **Summary**

Even though the U.S. comprises only 5% of the world’s general population, it has 25% of the world’s prison population. Even with this high rate of incarceration, the criminal justice system is not protecting people or making the streets safer. For instance, there is a 6% closure rate of cases of reported crime in St. Louis. These data reveal inadequate protection of the public from violence and crime.

There were public health issues raised at the forum associated with the criminal justice system. One was the failure of law enforcement to protect the public in general, a public health function. More specifically, the issue was raised to prevent vulnerable populations, such as people with disabilities, from entry and re-entry into the criminal justice system.

Effective public health for vulnerable populations may prevent incarceration and lead to self-sufficiency in the community.

### **Disability Prevention Issues**

Almost one-half of people who are incarcerated have a disability. The most common disabilities in this population are mental illness and substance abuse. In addition, due to long sentences, many incarcerated individuals are aging with multiple chronic health conditions that contribute to disability. Most people enter the justice system before turning 20 years of age. Therefore, there is an apparent need to identify at risk youth who may be susceptible to interventions that will prevent encounters with the justice system. Further, persons who are incarcerated with poor health and disabilities need public health interventions to prevent diminished health that can lead to disability and secondary disabling conditions. These initiatives are important to enable released incarcerated persons to be of good health to maximize opportunities for a self-sufficient life in the community.

**Intervention**

A letter was written to a presenter on health initiatives to prevent people with disabilities and at risk populations from entry and re-entry into the criminal justice system.

**Recommendation**

There should be effective prevention and treatment of people who are disabled to prevent diminished health which is a barrier to self-sufficient living in the community.