

**Joint Oversight Roundtable
On Public Safety, Behavioral Health Services, and Youth
December 13, 2023**

Testimony by Ovid Gabriel

Introduction

Good afternoon. My name is Ovid Gabriel. I'd like to share with you my experience as a system-impacted young person and recommendations to invest more in Credible Messengers and resources for youth in DC.

Role

Before I get into that it is important that y'all know I'm an artist.

My Experience

I grew up in Northwest DC. I went to Whittier Education Campus for elementary and middle and I always loved art class.

When I went to Paul, I was taught realism in art class. That's when I started drawing more.

I got into some trouble with the law when I was 13-14. That's when I realized how good I was at art.

The first portrait I did was of a refugee at YSC. People were shocked when they saw. Neither they nor I knew I could do that. I came out of my cell and there was a line of people wanting to see what I did.

Brittany Mobley from PDS got me an opportunity for a Smithsonian art internship. I was on track to start my internship when I was released but it got stopped due to COVID.

After that I tried to apply to Duke Ellington, but they didn't accept me.

In that same couple of months, I got re-arrested and sent to New Beginnings.

When I came home, I started doing tattoos and opened a tattoo studio. I had the skill set, but I didn't really know the business side to art.

I was shot 8 times at age 18 and was arrested for carrying. I wasn't able to contact anyone for a month, while I was in the hospital in surgery.

I was at DC Jail during my recovery.

My life hasn't been the straightest path, but I am working with the Justice Policy Institute, I have a tattoo shop, and I am here today trying to be a positive influence in my community.

My Experience with Credible Messengers

Credible Messengers are people who genuinely care. They go the extra mile for you.

Shawn and David Allen at New Beginnings were in my corner. They guided me on how to use art to my advantage. They helped me do murals and advocated for me.

My Credible Messenger, Anthony Petty, came every week to see me at New Beginnings. He was there when I was released and brought me clothes. He stayed in touch with me and would always pick up the phone when I called.

Credible Messengers are positive role models. They have gone through the same experiences we have and they share their lessons with us.

Which brings me back to my art. *[Explains art work.]*

Recommendations

Don't stop investing in Credible Messengers. They are the key.

Give more resources to support young people.