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FROM THE OFFICE OF STATE REPRESENTATIVE LA SHAWN K. FORD

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Ford Addresses Restorative Justice at Chicago Hearing

CHICAGO – State Rep. La Shawn Ford, D-Chicago, and the House Restorative Justice Committee held a hearing Monday, at the Bilandic Building in Chicago to discuss issues of fairness in the justice system and how the Legislature can begin to address them.

“As chair of the House Restorative Justice committee, it is my goal to use this committee as a vehicle to build upon and further the efforts of restorative justice principles, mending wounds and returning peace back to our neighborhoods,” Ford said. “I appreciate feedback and suggestions to help reach our goal of ensuring a voice and fair treatment for all. More meetings like this will lead to the policy changes necessary to make Illinois a land of opportunity for everyone, not a place where prison is the only option.”

The intent of the hearing was to educate legislators and state agencies on the work restorative justice advocates are doing on the community level. Individuals providing testimony focused on introducing legislators to the grassroots-style organizations working in their districts, and asked for their support for policies that equip communities with the tools to deal with effects of the criminal justice system.

"This is a great start," said Cheryl Graves of the Community Justice for Youth Institute. "The first step is education. Our success with Restorative Justice relies heavily on the effectiveness of peace circles, which are at the core of many of the organizations that testified today. We've been using the circle process for quite some time with youth in communities and schools to resolve conflicts and prevent violence. We've been able to expand the impact of restorative justice by training educators, parents, faith organizations, police officers, court officials and public housing residents to build relationships that foster open communication, address trauma and promote healing. Peace circles are even being used by attorneys in criminal litigation to address felony matters, including a capital murder case."

Other participants included: Guy Loudon, of the Jane Addams Resource Corporation; Father David Kelly, of Precious Blood Ministry for Reconciliation; Dr. Elena Quintana, of the Adler Institute on Public Safety and Social Justice; Ethan Ucker, of Circles and Ciphers; Sally Wolf, of the Illinois Balanced and Restorative Justice Initiative; Rev. Robert Spicer, of Englewood Mennonite Church; Elizabeth Dozier, principal of Fenger High School; Lynn Morton, of COFI/POWER-PAC; victim's advocates Andrea Hug and Phillip Peterson; Carmen Casas, deputy chief of the Cook County Juvenile Probation system; defense attorney Emmanuel Andre; retired judge George Timberlake, now an advisor to the Coalition for Juvenile Justice; MaryAnn Dyar, of Adult Redeploy; John Maki of the John Howard Association; Betsy Clark, of the Juvenile Justice Initiative; Tony Lowery of the Safer Foundation; and Jamie Noto, of Youth Outreach Services.

“We want to thank the Restorative Justice Committee for holding this hearing,” said George Timberlake. “We need laws and courts that listen to the past experiences and current needs of everyone affected by a crime. Reducing crime and repairing the harm to victims and communities is dependent upon changing the attitude that punishment is an effective

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tool to change behavior. Restorative justice is a useful way to increase public safety, produce better outcomes for offenders, victims and communities, and to do so with fewer taxpayer dollars.”

“The Restorative Justice Committee is set up to play a vital role in promoting safer communities and more effective responses and strategies to violence and crime,” said Maki. “As the executive director of the John Howard Association, Illinois' only non-partisan prison watchdog, I want to thank Representative Ford and his colleagues for bringing together advocates, state agencies, and community-based providers to create real and cost-effective solutions to these difficult problems.”

For more information, contact one of Ford’s constituent service offices: 816 S. Oak Park Avenue in Oak Park at 708-445-3673, 5104 W. Chicago Avenue in Chicago at 773-378-5902 or in the Stratton Office Building in Springfield at 217-782-5962.

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