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P/PV Joins Leading Social Policy Experts to Highlight Strategies for Engaging Disconnected Men

New York City—P/PV President Frederick A. Davie and Senior Advisor W. Wilson Goode, Sr., joined a diverse group of urban policy experts on Wednesday at the Manhattan Institute's Center for Civic Innovation event, "Moving Men into the Mainstream." After a morning of sobering statistics, particularly about low employment and education and high incarceration rates among black men, Davie and Goode sounded a hopeful note, focusing on promising findings from two P/PV initiatives: the Ready4Work prisoner reentry demonstration and Amachi, a mentoring program for children incarcerated parents.

The "Moving Men into the Mainstream" event is one of a slate of recent conferences, publications and news stories highlighting troubling trends among America's black (and, in some cases, Latino) men. By almost every measure, these men are falling behind. Nationally, the high school graduation rate for white students is 78 percent, compared with just 55 percent for African American students and 53 percent for Hispanic students. This educational deficit takes a particularly large toll on young black men: in 2004, 72 percent of black male high school dropouts were unemployed (compared with 34 percent of white dropouts and 19 percent of Hispanic dropouts). Many of these young men end up in prison. Between 1986 and 1997, the number of incarcerated non-Hispanic whites rose considerably (by two thirds), but this growth was dwarfed by the rise in incarceration rates among African Americans—that number doubled during the same period. In 2004, 21 percent of black men who didn't attend college were incarcerated. Most of them will go back again and again: statistics show that more than half of those released from prison will be reincarcerated within three years.

P/PV's Ready4Work initiative represents one of the most ambitious responses to this national crisis. It serves approximately 5,000 formerly incarcerated people throughout the US—the vast majority of the program's participants are young African American men. Davie described the initiative as a test of the concept that different sectors—faith- and community based organizations, businesses and the criminal justice system—could collaborate to reduce recidivism. In 17 sites around the country, Ready4Work provides job training and placement, intensive case management and mentoring services to ex-offenders. Thus far, the results are highly encouraging: 65 percent of adult Ready4Work participants have found jobs, and 60 percent of those with jobs retained them for more than three months. Perhaps more striking, recidivism rates for Ready4Work participants appear to be about half the national average.

What's the key to the initiative's success? Work, says Davie. "Work, with the appropriate supports, is the best avenue for reconnecting alienated men to mainstream society. Ready4Work proves what we've always known. The challenge now is to take it to scale. Consultations such as this one are crucial to this big next step."

With the Amachi initiative, P/PV has taken a different, more preventive approach to prisoner reentry: According to W. Wilson Goode, Sr., former mayor of Philadelphia and now director of the Amachi program, "The best reentry policy is *no entry*." Through partnerships between secular and faith-based organizations, Amachi provides caring adult mentors to children of incarcerated parents, aiming to break the cycle of incarceration and recidivism before it begins. Amachi was launched in Philadelphia in 2001, and has spread rapidly; there are now at least 108 Amachi-modeled programs in 85 US cities and 35 states. To date, these programs have served more than 15,000 children. "Here, as with work, we know mentoring produces very positive and lasting effects," says Davie, "thus, we need to make sure that the 5 million children at risk have an opportunity to be mentored. What better investment of public and private resources?"

P/PV will release an interim brief about Ready4Work's outcomes later this summer; Goode's report on the Amachi initiative, *Building from the Ground Up*, is available on P/PV's website, www.ppv.org. P/PV is a national nonprofit organization whose mission is to improve the effectiveness of social policies, programs and community initiatives, especially as they affect youth and young adults.