

***Testimony of Francisco Gonzalez  
City Council Hearing on GED Testing  
January 14, 2009***

Good morning. Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Francisco Gonzalez. I live in the Bronx. I'm 30 years old.

In May 2006 I came home after doing 7 months in Rikers Island for drug sales.

I stayed home for a few months, but by August I was back on the streets, doing the same stuff that got me locked up. I was on the streets for about four months, but it was affecting me. I saw the destruction I was doing to the community and to my family. I didn't want to go back to jail. I didn't want to have to explain to my daughter again where I had been for four or five years.

But I felt helpless. That's all I knew; that's all I could do. I wanted change, but I didn't have anyone to help me.

In December 2006, I went to apply for Public Assistance. There was someone there from the Fortune Society making a presentation. I remember he said, "It doesn't matter if you did one day in jail or a year, Fortune can help you." The next week I went down to the Fortune Society.

Fortune helps people involved in the criminal justice system re-enter into society. They have an education program, career development, substance abuse treatment, alternatives to incarceration, housing, and more.

I enrolled in Fortune's treatment program and in January 2007 I stopped getting high. I was clean, but I was still running the streets. In July 2007, I lost my housing and moved into the Castle, Fortune's residence on 140<sup>th</sup> Street and Riverside Drive. That was when I really made the change and surrendered completely.

I enrolled in the Fortune's Career Development program. When I finished that, I started taking GED classes and computer classes. When I signed up to take the GED test the first time, it took me three months to get a test date. Then when I got to the test site, there were 100's of people on line. They were mostly all walk-ins, but I had to get on the same line with them. It was very disorganized there. It was noisy and under-supervised.

On that test I passed everything but the writing, which I failed by 20 points. So I went back to class and kept studying. The next application I sent out never came back. Finally, my teacher got me a date at La Guardia Community College. That time I passed the writing and obtained my GED.

Since then I got a job. I'm working as a chauffer. Six months ago, I moved out of the Castle into my own apartment. And I've registered for college. I'm going to start at BMCC on January 26<sup>th</sup>.

The GED made a big difference in my life. We need more GED classes and more testing. Before I obtained my GED that's all I wanted. Once I did, I said, "Why stop there. The sky's the limit."