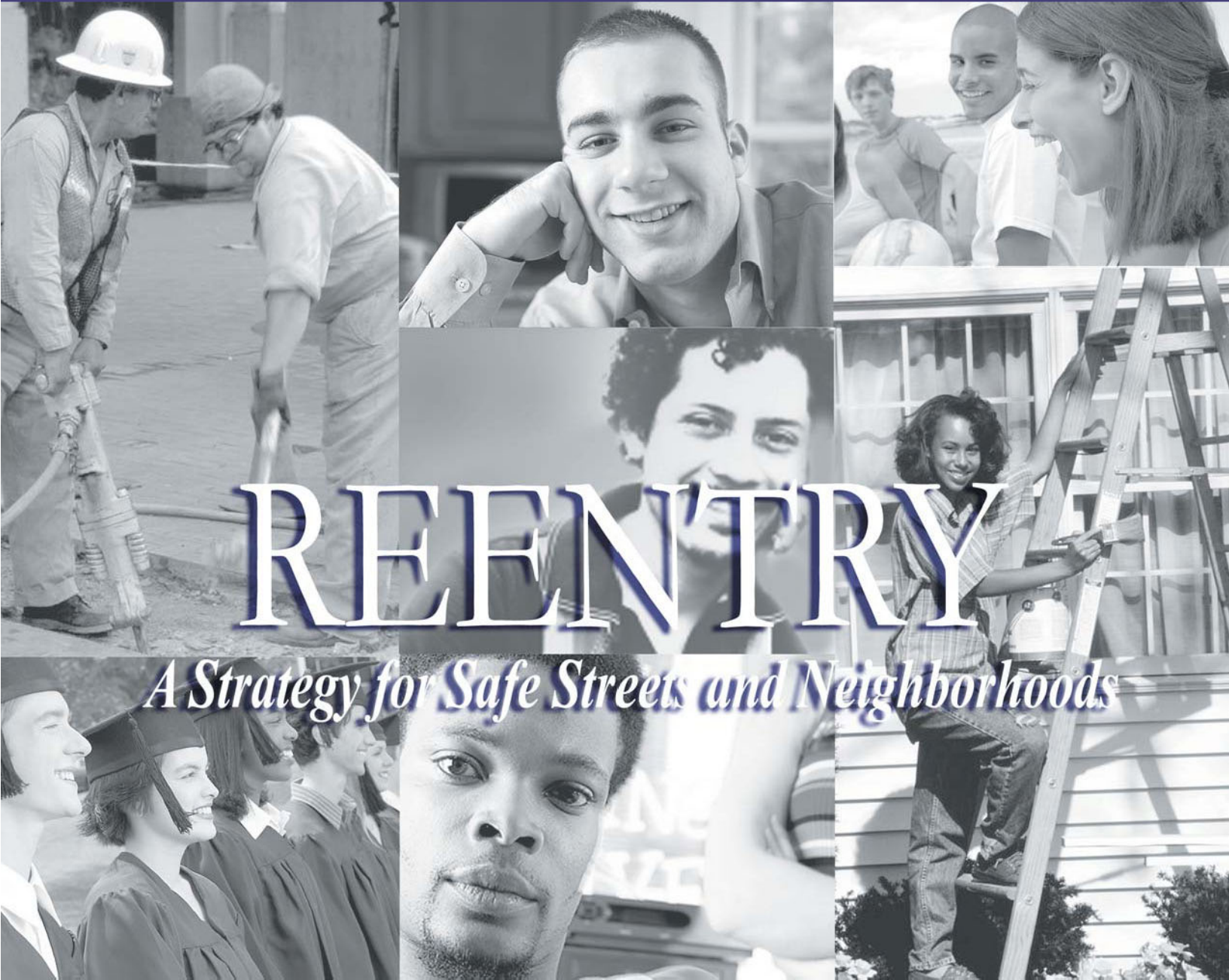




# The State of New Jersey



# REENTRY

*A Strategy for Safe Streets and Neighborhoods*

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Governor



## OVERVIEW

Each year nearly 16,000 adult and juvenile offenders are released from state correctional facilities and return to cities and towns throughout New Jersey. The protection of public safety requires that every effort be made to ensure that these returning offenders do not commit new crimes. Unfortunately, the majority of those released from New Jersey's prisons will not go on to lead law-abiding, productive lives. In fact, nearly two-thirds (65%) of adult offenders will be rearrested within five years after being released from prison. Over one-third (37%) of the juveniles committed to the Juvenile Justice Commission are reincarcerated in a juvenile or adult facility within two years of release. Crimes committed by the formally incarcerated represent a serious threat to public safety that must be confronted head on. "Reentry" is a term commonly used to describe efforts to reduce the recidivism rates of former prisoners.

The efforts to address reentry must acknowledge up front that this issue involves significant challenges while also recognizing that there are well-documented examples of success. The challenges are self-evident. Those returning to communities from prison disproportionately have issues with substance abuse, physical illness, low educational achievement, and poor job skills. Even so, the experience of many model programs demonstrates that through concentrated efforts recidivism can be reduced. Among those who have participated in drug courts, for example, the recidivism rate is less than 15 percent. Specific programs that provide coordinated services similarly demonstrate that public safety and fiscal efficiency can be advanced. As challenging as the task of reducing offender recidivism is, there is evidence that concerted and coordinated efforts can succeed.

New Jersey is well suited to undertake such an effort. In 2003 the Reentry Roundtable brought together 75 public and private non-profits representatives to evaluate reentry efforts. In 2004 the National Governors Association supported a "Reentry Policy Academy," which brought together key players to design an action agenda for improving prisoner reentry. With the coordination of the National Governors Association project, the New Jersey Department of Corrections, the State Parole Board, the Department of Labor and Workforce Development and other state agencies began to focus on prisoner reentry. In April, 2004, for example, the Department of Corrections created an Office of Transitional Services to coordinate and improve reentry services. This office, as well as others in DOC, have undertaken many efforts to improve reentry programming, including through agreements with the Social Security Administration to secure identification and through development of a comprehensive reentry curriculum. These efforts by state agencies are amplified by the efforts of local governments and the non-profit community, who are joining forces to focus on this issue.

To that end, a reentry working group with members from the private sector, higher education, and the state departments and agencies responsible for serving the offender and ex-offender populations recently began meeting to consider how New Jersey could build on the reentry planning and implementation steps that have already been undertaken and design an action agenda for New Jersey that takes the state's reentry work to the next level.

This reentry plan, informed by that work, includes strategies for reducing the recidivism rates of ex-inmates by enhancing efforts that foster successful reintegration. A common theme that runs throughout the plan is the need for closely coordinated and collaborative efforts among state agencies and among local government agencies and community-based programs serving the needs of ex-offenders. The actions in this plan are designed to address the multiple risks and needs factors that contribute to recidivism, such as lack of gainful employment, lack of housing, unaddressed medical needs and legal

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# REENTRY

## *A Strategy for Safe Streets and Neighborhoods*

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barriers to successful reentry. The plan is data-driven and includes an evaluation component that focuses on tracking outcomes to determine if these efforts are successful in reducing offender recidivism. The plan outlines steps that will be taken in a number of areas including:

- **Coordination, Oversight and Collaboration** – The Attorney General will appoint a Reentry Coordinator who will be responsible for coordinating and overseeing all State reentry efforts, developing collaborations with municipal and community-based groups working with ex-inmates, establishing recidivism reduction goals for these projects, and evaluating outcomes. The Attorney General will appoint a Reentry Coordinating Council that will assist the Coordinator in fulfilling his or her responsibilities. The Coordinator will also be responsible for coordinating reentry efforts with those of the overall Strategy for Safe Streets and Neighborhoods.
- **A demonstration initiative, called “Another Chance,”** comprised of twelve components that will focus on inmates returning to the cities of Camden, Newark and Trenton from four Department of Corrections’ facilities, is being undertaken. This initiative, which would be rigorously evaluated to determine its effectiveness in reducing re-offense rates, will be the first step in institutionalizing a more systemically holistic approach to prisoner reentry.
- **Reentry Policy and Program Initiatives** – Specific reentry related initiatives in the areas of family involvement, employment readiness, photo identification, and law enforcement information sharing and collaboration, all directed at improving reentry success rates and lowering recidivism rates will be implemented.
- **Legislative Issues** – Identifies issues and makes proposals for statutory change in the areas of relief from collateral consequences of criminal convictions, fines and penalties, mandatory driver’s license revocation and expungement.
- **Juvenile Reentry** – While some of the reentry initiatives described above include juvenile offenders, specific steps directed at the special needs of juvenile offenders are also being taken. These steps, in the areas of education, assessment-driven treatment and supervision, involvement of families, transitional step-down programming, regional vocational training centers, juvenile involvement in pre-release planning, job training and placement, specialized reentry services for juveniles with mental health needs and collaborative pre-release planning, are all specifically focused on reducing the re-offense rates of juveniles released from JJC facilities.

## I. INTRODUCTION

New Jersey, like nearly every other state in the nation, has experienced large increases in its prison population as a result of a myriad of changes to state sentencing laws. From 1979, the year that New Jersey's current Criminal Code was enacted, to today, for example, New Jersey's prison population nearly quadrupled – growing from fewer than 7,000 inmates to over 27,000 inmates today.<sup>1</sup> Nearly every offender sent to prison is eventually released, resulting in a commensurately large increase in the number of prisoners being released back into society. In fiscal year 2006, for example, 13,910 inmates were released from Department of Corrections' custody. Another 1,603 juveniles returned home from Juvenile Justice Commission secure and residential facilities in 2006. The protection of public safety requires that every effort be made to ensure that these returning offenders do not commit new crimes, once released.

Crimes committed by those who have been released from a state prison or a juvenile facility not only threaten the safety and security of our communities, they represent a lost opportunity. Of the over 14,000 state prison inmates released annually, 3,554 will be arrested for committing a new offense within the first twelve months of release. Another nearly 3,000 parolees of the over 14,000 that are under parole supervision at any one time are returned to prison each year for failure to comply with the conditions of their parole supervision. It is clear that public safety could be significantly enhanced by reducing the re-offense rates of these former inmates and increasing the percentage of ex-inmates who successfully transition back to community life. This has the added benefit of reduced victimization, not to mention the benefit to the ex-offender in becoming a productive member of society.

Increasingly, initiatives to protect public safety include focused efforts to improve the “success rates” of former prisoners and reduce the high number of former inmates who return to prison for new offenses or for technical parole violations. These efforts typically fall under the rubric of “reentry.” Reentry programs recognize that the time that inmates who return to prison each year spent enmeshed in the criminal justice system was an opportunity for that offender to change his or her thought patterns and behavior and to adopt pro-social norms. An offender's time in the criminal justice system is also viewed as an opportunity to attempt to provide that individual with the knowledge, skills and tools needed to lead a law abiding life.

What exactly is reentry? In some respects, anything that could affect an inmate's prospects upon release could be called a reentry program. In that regard, conceivably every aspect of corrections and parole operations could be called reentry. One expert in the field has noted that prisoner reentry “simply defined, includes all activities and programming conducted to prepare ex-offenders to return safely to the community and to live as law abiding citizens.”<sup>2</sup> From this perspective, every educational, vocational or treatment program offered by the Department of Corrections is a reentry program. Every part of parole supervision is a reentry program. Every job placement program is a reentry program. Every intervention with an inmate or ex-inmate that could be construed as contributing to their likelihood of successfully adapting to community life could be considered a reentry initiative.

Reggie Wilkinson, former Director of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections and president of the American Corrections Association, has offered another perspective: “Reentry is a philosophy, not a program.”<sup>3</sup> Wilkinson's point is that reentry is not just a series of separate programs, but rather a general approach to working with offenders that is specifically focused on assisting inmates and ex-inmates to lead productive, law-abiding lives. Whatever shape or form reentry efforts take, they are always focused on protecting public safety by reducing the re-offense rate of formerly incarcerated adult and/or juvenile offenders.



Wilkenson's view is in concert with the emerging consensus about the complexity of reentry. Inmates typically present a plethora of risks and needs, and it is now generally recognized that successful reentry efforts need to involve collaborative and integrated efforts involving multiple agencies across all levels of government, with local community-based organizations as partners in these efforts. Reentry is not solely the responsibility of a correctional authority – successful reentry programs typically involve collaborative efforts between agencies that can meet offender education, treatment, housing, employment, and healthcare needs. When multiple agencies at all levels of government and at the grassroots level prioritize the provision of services to offenders returning to communities, reentry success rates can be improved. Successful reintegration of ex-inmates contributes to public safety through a reduction in recidivism.

## **II. PROFILE OF EX-INMATES REENTERING OUR COMMUNITIES**

The overwhelming majority (93%) of state prison inmates released in 2006 were male. Sixty-two percent were African-American, 16 percent were Hispanic, and 22 percent were White. Sixteen percent were 24 years or younger, 22 percent were 25-29 years old, 16 percent were 30-34 years old, and 17 percent were 35-39 years old. Twenty-nine percent were over age forty. Nearly three-quarters (74%) were single at the time of release. Over one-half (58%) of the male inmate population reported having at least one child and 26 percent of the entire prison population has an outstanding child support or paternity issue.

Less than one-half (49%) of those state prisoners released in 2006 had a high school diploma or a general equivalency degree. Literature also reflects that the prevalence of behavioral and physical health problems is greater among the inmate population than among the general public. In 2001, 12 percent of all releasees had a diagnosed mental health disorder. Sixty percent of male releasees and 72 percent of female releasees have a drug addiction or other substance abuse disorder. Yet despite the lack of general educational attainment and the prevalence of mental illness and substance abuse disorders, and despite the fact that the Department of Corrections offers numerous academic and treatment programs, there are impediments, including, but not limited to, waiting lists, limited space and funding limitations that do not allow the Department to offer programming to all those in need. As an indication of these limitations, nearly four out of every ten (38%) inmates discharged from a state prison during the past twelve months had not participated in any educational or treatment program.

The inmate population has a higher incidence of physical health problems, as well. The Department of Corrections did not begin performing routine HIV testing at intake until April, 2007, so the known HIV and AIDS rates probably underestimate the true level of this problem, but even given this, the known rate of 3.4 percent is over ten times the HIV and AIDS rate in the general population (less than one-third of one percent). We also know that the prevalence of other physical health problems, such as Hepatitis-B and Hepatitis-C, is higher than in the general population. Also, the State Parole Board estimates that approximately 10 percent of parolees released during the previous 12 months had no permanent living arrangement to return to, and were considered homeless.

The average time spent under the jurisdiction of the Department of Corrections prior to release for inmates released in 2006 was two years and two months. The median prison time served among this group was one year and five months. Over one-half (58.5%) of inmates released in 2006 were released

to parole supervision. An increasing number of inmates serve their complete incarcerative sentence (commonly referred to as “maxing out”) because they either are denied parole or refuse parole, or because time credits reduce their sentence to the mandatory minimum. In 2006, 34.2 percent of all releasees “maxed out.” These individuals return to their communities without any supervision or support from the State Parole Board Division of Parole. An additional 5.8 percent of inmates were released to Probation Services’ Intensive Supervision Program (ISP) and the remaining 1.3 percent were released on appeal or bond.

Inmates released from state prisons in 2006 primarily returned to New Jersey’s large cities. In fact, nearly one out of every five (19.9%) persons released from a state prison in 2006 returned to either Newark (10.5%) or Camden (9.4%). Over four out of every ten (41.1%) inmates released from state prison in 2006 returned to either Newark, Camden, Jersey City (6.3%), Patterson (6.0%), Elizabeth (3.2%), Atlantic City (3.0%), or Trenton (3.3%). In 2003, the Urban Institute geomapped the density of all parolees living in the cities of Newark and Camden.<sup>4</sup> That project illustrated that the density of parolees among the general population varied significantly from block to block, with some neighborhoods experiencing very high concentrations of parolees and some neighborhoods having no parolees living in them.

Of all adolescents released from JJC facilities and programs in 2006, 94 percent were males and six percent were females. Of the same group of all 2006 JJC releases, 9.8 percent were ages 13 through 15, 71.4 percent were ages 16 through 18 and 18.8 percent were over age 18 at the time of release. More than seven out of every ten (70.9%) of the 2006 JJC releasees were African-American, 16.6 percent were Hispanic, and 11.6 percent were White.

Like adults released from state prisons, juveniles released from JJC programs return primarily to urban areas. In 2006, nearly one in three releasees (31.2%) returned to Camden County. Another 12.7 percent returned to Essex County. Over three quarters (75.4%) of all adolescents released in 2006 returned to six counties – Camden, Essex, Union (9.2%), Mercer (8.2%), Passaic (8.0%) and Atlantic (6.1%).

Of the 1,603 2006 releases, 1,138 (71.0%) had been committed to the JJC and 465 (29.0%) were probationers who were placed in a JJC residential group center as a condition of probation. Of the committed juveniles, 31.8 percent were paroled, 48.3% completed sentence and were released or returned to post incarceration supervision, and 15.6 percent “maxed out” and returned to communities without any parole supervision or support.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps even more so than adults released from state prison, adolescents released from JJC facilities and programs typically have a litany of problems and needs. For example, data from the JJC’s intake unit indicates that 60 percent of juveniles had an indicated need for residential substance abuse treatment, 15 percent had a dual diagnosis of substance abuse and mental illness, 26 percent had a history of being prescribed psychotropic medication, 26 percent had a parent or caregiver who had been incarcerated and 22 percent had a parent with a history of substance abuse.

In summary, both adults and juveniles being discharged from correctional facilities are predominantly young minority males who typically have multiple needs and risk factors and return primarily to a limited number of urban areas. The challenge from a reentry perspective is to address the risks and needs these individuals have while they are under the aegis of the criminal and juvenile justice systems in ways that will maximize the probability that these ex-offenders will lead law-abiding, productive lives upon discharge.

### III. COORDINATION/OVERSIGHT/COLLABORATION

Building on the words of Wilkinson, successful reentry is not a program or a series of programs, it is an approach in which every interaction with an offender is directed at imparting the beliefs, knowledge and skills that they will need to successfully transition back to their communities to lead law abiding, productive lives. Successful reentry requires systems integration, not just so that work begun in prison is continued by parole in the community, but so that Labor and Workforce Development, Community Affairs, and Health and Senior Services are collaborating with Corrections and Parole to address offender employment, housing and health needs. Successful reentry initiatives also require integration of efforts between State and local government agencies and community providers so that efforts to support offender reentry are integrated with the services of county social service boards, local housing and economic development authorities and local service providers.

**Action Step #1:** *Create a Reentry Coordinating Council and appoint a full-time coordinator to oversee the State's reentry efforts.*

The Attorney General will establish a Reentry Coordinating Council to assist in coordinating those aspects of reentry that cut across numerous State departments and agencies. The Attorney General will appoint a Reentry Coordinator, who will chair the Reentry Coordinating Council and oversee the State's reentry programs and efforts, including a demonstration project, to ensure their focus on reducing recidivism. The Reentry Coordinator, assisted by the Council, will also be charged with setting objective and measurable goals for recidivism reduction expected from the State's reentry programs. The Council will consist of members appointed by the Attorney General and will draw on the expertise of the following lead departments and agencies in this area: the Department of Corrections; the Juvenile Justice Commission; the State Parole Board, the Department of Children and Families, the Department of Community Affairs, the Department of Health and Senior Services, the Department of Labor and Workforce Development; the Department of Human Services; the Department of Education; and the Office of the Public Defender.

Government agencies cannot, in and of themselves, create and run successful reentry systems. Reentry is not solely the responsibility of government. Successful reentry requires the coordinated and supportive efforts of ex-offenders, families, employers and community-based organizations. Since many of the services and supports that ex-offenders need in order to successfully reintegrate back into their communities are provided by community-based organizations, it is especially important that government agencies partner with these organizations and that their efforts be coordinated and complimentary to the efforts of these community-based organizations.

A primary responsibility of the Reentry Coordinator, with the assistance of the Reentry Coordinating Council, will be to foster collaboration among and between government agencies and community-based organizations providing services to ex-offenders. The Council will also draw on the expertise of other state and local entities, including community-based organizations that provide services to ex-offenders, local governments, and learn from the experiences of victims and ex-offenders themselves in implementing its goals. The Council will also collaborate with public and private reentry experts, advocates, and programs, and build partnerships with these groups.

**Action Step #2:** *Employ objective and measurable benchmarks and goals.*

In many respects, the attention being paid to reentry is a relatively recent phenomenon, a focus created by the large increases in the number of people incarcerated, and thus released. We still have much to



learn about what works for whom under what set of circumstances. In order to be successful, it is important that the State's reentry efforts be data-driven and focused on outcomes. It is also important that reentry initiatives be rigorously evaluated to determine what works and what does not.

For these reasons, each aspect of the State's reentry efforts will have objective and measurable benchmarks and goals. The Reentry Coordinator, with the assistance of the Coordinating Council, will adopt a data-driven approach and regularly review and evaluate the State's reentry programs with the goal of discontinuing programs that are ineffective. The Reentry Coordinator will report on relevant performance metrics outcomes, as appropriate.

## **IV. "ANOTHER CHANCE" INITIATIVE**

Changing a system of reentry that involves multiple agencies that must communicate and collaborate regarding a current state prison population of over 27,000 inmates, of which 16,000 offenders are released annually, does not happen overnight. Change needs to be planned, thoughtful and achievable. The State's work will begin with a twelve-component demonstration project that is a scalable initiative that will begin the process of systems change in a finite context with a manageable population.

**Action Step #3:** *Create a multifaceted reentry demonstration project called "Another Chance" to focus reentry programming and services on a group of up to 1,300 male and female offenders returning to the cities of Newark, Camden and Trenton from four Department of Corrections' prisons. Outcomes will be evaluated to determine if these services have significantly reduced recidivism among the demonstration project's participants.*

This demonstration project is intended to reduce recidivism rates of participants. Recidivism, measured in three ways - rearrest, reconviction and reincarceration - will be monitored for the demonstration project participants at six month intervals for five years post-release. These recidivism rates will be compared to the recidivism rates for a group of offenders meeting the demonstration project's eligibility criteria who were released prior to the implementation of the demonstration project to determine if Another Chance has achieved a statistically significant reduction in recidivism from the baseline.

This project will also assess several key process measures, including: employment numbers and percentages; housing stability numbers and percentages; and the number and percentage of releasees who are receiving healthcare. Each component will also have performance metrics.

The Reentry Coordinator, with the assistance of the Reentry Coordinating Council, will be responsible for managing the implementation of the Another Chance Initiative and will review project implementation, provide a forum for resolving interagency issues, and monitor projects outcomes.

The Another Chance initiative will enable the State to begin the process of implementing a multi-agency collaborative system wide program focused on improving ex-inmate community adjustment rates. With the exception of educational and vocational programming, a criterion for inclusion in the initiative was that each component of the Another Chance initiative had to be something that could be implemented system wide as the State expands the magnitude of its reentry programming. While Another Chance participants will be given access to educational and vocational programming, system wide access is not possible due to the substantial fiscal implications it will entail.

## **The Initiative Cohort**

Three groups of inmates have been identified for inclusion in the Another Chance initiative. All three groups include inmates returning to the cities of Newark, Camden and Trenton from four state prisons - Garden State Youth Correctional Facility, Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women, Northern State Prison and Riverfront State Prison, and from the residential community release programs (RCRP) in which these prisons serve as the regional institution. The first group will be comprised of up to 550 inmates newly admitted to the four designated state prisons.<sup>6</sup> This group will be offered the opportunity to participate in all of the in-prison components of the Another Chance initiative. Inmates in this group selected for participation must meet the following requirements:

- they must be newly admitted inmates;
- they must be released back to either Camden, Newark or Trenton;
- they must have been incarcerated at Garden State Youth Correctional Facility, Edna Mahan, Northern State Prison or Riverfront State Prison or a halfway house associated with any of these institutions prior to release;
- they must be offered the opportunity to participate in the treatment/educational modules incorporated in the Another Chance initiative; and
- they may not be inmates released under the provisions of the No Early Release Act (NERA).

This group will be exposed to all twelve components of Another Chance. However, due to the mean length of stay - 26 months - it will take years before we are able to evaluate how effective the Another Chance initiative is in reducing offender recidivism using the outcomes from this group.

In order to produce outcomes earlier, a second similar group of inmates will be included in the Another Chance initiative. As the first group, this second group of inmates will be returning to the cities of Newark, Camden and Trenton from the four designated prisons or the Residential Community Release Program (RCRP) associated with these institutions. This group will include up to 330 inmates who are within nine months of release from the four institutions and associated RCRPs.

This second group will receive the Department of Corrections pre-release curriculum and assistance with the application for public assistance described in Components Four and Five (below) and all of the post-release components of the Another Chance initiative.

The third group will be comprised of 450 parolees currently under the supervision of the New Jersey State Parole Board. District Offices located in Newark, Camden and Trenton will have a random sample of 150 parolees each, all who have been released to the district office within the prior six months and who are not identified as No Early Release Act (NERA) offenders. This group will receive the post-release aspects of the Another Chance initiative.

As previously stated, there are twelve discrete components included in the Another Chance initiative. A brief description of each component and the project's goals and the key measures of goal attainment are outlined below.

## **Component One: Assessment Driven Treatment**

### **Action:**

A risk/needs assessment process will be used to assess access to in-prison education and training opportunities and identify individual reentry plans that address offender needs and build on offender strengths. A strong education component that seeks to increase inmate basic skills and provide inmates the opportunity to work toward a GED will be provided to Another Chance inmates, where appropriate. Another Chance inmates will be afforded access to in-prison programming.

### **Goals:**

- Administer the Level of Services Inventory-Revised (LSI-R) risk/needs assessment to all inmates in the cohort.
- Develop an individualized service plan (ISP) that recommends programming that addresses the risks and needs identified in the LSI-R assessment. Also, develop a comprehensive discharge plan that assists in identifying post release services and referrals and links to said services.
- Afford inmates participating in Another Chance access to the Department of Corrections' four core social services programs as identified in the individualized service plan.
- Administer and determine educational improvement of all Another Chance inmates, as measured by the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE).

## **Component Two: Increased Involvement of Families**

### **Action:**

Family involvement with an offender will be maintained to the greatest extent possible. Families will be encouraged to maintain contact with inmates during their term of imprisonment. Parole officers will meet with family members as part of their pre-release planning and parole officers will utilize family members as resources for maintaining parolees in their communities.

### **Goals:**

- Establish and provide video teleconference (VTC) visits at each of the four correctional facilities identified in the project.
- Develop and make accessible a handbook for the inmates' families.
- Develop and distribute - at intake - literature to the inmate population on the topic of discussing incarceration with their children.
- Involve and increase the number of family members contacted and engaged in the pre-release planning process.
- Create family-friendly visitation areas in each visit hall, which will include a designated area for parent/child interaction with resources to help parents and children communicate naturally, including security conscious age appropriate reading materials for oral story reading, educational games, puzzles, etc.

## **Component Three: Job Training and Placement**

### **Action:**

The Department of Labor and Workforce Development (LWD) will work collaboratively with the Department of Corrections and the State Parole Board in efforts to:

- identify vocational training opportunities that meet work force needs and are credentialed in a way that is meaningful to potential employers;
- integrate the One-Stop Career Centers into the work of Corrections and Parole in ways that meet the needs of returning offenders; and
- employ innovative and creative ways of facilitating the employment of ex-offenders.

### **Goals:**

Provide inmates with entry level proficiency skills to enter high-demand industry trades, as identified by LWD.

- Determine inmates' interest and aptitude levels using the CareerScope interest inventory.
- Provide inmates with high-demand/high-wage Career Technical Education programming, in the facilities that provide industry-recognized certification - to ensure that successful skill-matching job placement is achieved upon release.
- Enter into memoranda of agreement with county vocational schools to provide training, certification and job placement in the high-demand/high wage employment areas.
- Increase available and effective literacy programs in the four selected correctional institutions through the implementation of Creation of Workforce Learning Links.
- The State Employment and Training Commission will collaborate with LWD to assess all Department of Corrections (DOC), Juvenile Justice Commission and Parole Board vocational programs to determine and measure whether they are consistent with the industrial based certification standards and demands of the labor market.
- Increasing job opportunities and job retention for releasees through the use of on-the-job training grants to employers, job coaching, basic skills development, training in demand occupations, bonding assistance and increased employer outreach, by ensuring that each releasee: registers with the LWD One-Stop system; has a discharge plan that has been assessed/evaluated by LWD and DOC; has been provided with a Job Coach; and receives information on statewide "ex-offender friendly" employers. This will increase short-term and long-term numbers for employment.

## **Component Four: Reentry Preparation and Training**

### **Action:**

Another Chance inmates will be offered DOC's comprehensive 24-module curriculum of reentry preparation entitled Successful Transition and Reentry Series (STARS). STARS focuses on such skills as how to open a bank account, find an apartment, search for a job, resolve disputes responsibly, etc.

### **Goal:**

- Achieve full participation and successful completion for all cohort inmates who register for STARS.

## **Component Five: Expedited Assistance Applications**

### **Action:**

Provide benefit information for in-prison applications for public assistance programs such as general assistance (GA), food stamps, TANF, SSI, etc. for Another Chance participants through a collaboration between the Department of Corrections and the Camden, Essex and Mercer Boards of Social Services. This will make it possible for an eligibility determination to be made as close to release as possible.

### **Goal:**

- Reduce the gap between release and receipt of benefits from public assistance programs by providing assistance in applying and pre-qualifying for public assistance and veteran's benefits. At discharge, provide completed applications to all cohort inmates who have applied for benefits.

## **Component Six: Inmate Involvement in Release Planning**

Discharge plans will address housing, social services, medical care, employment and other important reentry issues.

### **Action:**

Implement a comprehensive pre-release planning process that includes the Division of Parole, and halfway house or day reporting center staff, if inmates are transitioning to those facilities, and the One-Stop Career Centers to address the needs for housing, social services, medical care, employment and other important reentry issues.

### **Goal:**

- Upon admission, Residential Community Release Programs will review and prepare release plans that will be forwarded to the District Parole Office. Max-outs will be counseled and given the Discharge Plan as a guide to use upon release back into their community. Additionally, One-Stop Career Center staff will provide information and participate in the pre-release planning process.

## **Component Seven: Viable Photo Identification**

### **Action:**

Inmates being released from the Department of Corrections will receive a viable photo identification card that will be recognized by the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission.

### **Goals:**

- Ensure that inmates who fit the eligibility criteria as outlined by the Office of Vital Statistics and the eligibility criteria as outlined by the MOU between SSA and DOC leave state prison with a valid birth certificate and/or social security card.
- Ensure that all eligible inmates are provided with photo identification that will be recognized by the MVC, pursuant to its discretionary authority - as per the MOU executed between DOC, State Parole Board and MVC.



## **Component Eight: Assessment Driven Transition**

### **Action:**

When determined by an objective risk/needs assessment as appropriate, and when permissible under New Jersey statutes and Department of Corrections' policies, Another Chance inmates will be transitioned through halfway houses and/or day reporting centers.

### **Goal:**

- Provide every eligible and appropriate inmate in DOC custody the opportunity to participate in a transitional Residential Community Release Program (RCRP) that will assess needs and risks, such as: substance abuse needs; level of recidivism; static and dynamic factors and likelihood of success in community programs. RCRPs will also counsel all inmates who are maxing-out and link them to appropriate community services.

## **Component Nine: Meeting Ex-Inmate Housing Needs**

### **Action:**

The Department of Community Affairs, in partnership with the State Parole Board, will expand the post-incarceration housing resources available for use by inmates released from prison without a stable housing arrangement.

### **Goal:**

- All cohort inmates will be released from Department of Corrections' facilities with viable short-term housing that will include education and employment programming to assist the releasee in obtaining the resources to obtain permanent affordable housing. Increase of the permanent supportive housing resources available for use by ex-offenders being released by the Department of Corrections who have special needs will help them maintain recovery and retain their housing.

## **Component Ten: Meeting Releasees' Health Care Needs**

### **Action:**

A collaboration between the Department of Health and Senior Services and DOC to identify creative ways of meeting the health needs of ex-inmates, including an electronic transfer of medical records from the Department of Corrections to a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) in the area that an inmate is returning to, where appropriate. The State Parole Board will collaborate in case managing the health care of ex-inmates by ensuring that parolees have and keep appointments with health care providers.

## **Goal:**

- Increase the number of inmates released from prison who will experience a continuity of medical care upon release through their request for medical records with a signed release or transfer of their records to the medical provider of their choice. If the inmate does not have a provider of choice, the inmate will be provided information on an FQHC as an alternative provider. The State Parole Board Division of Parole will assist the releasees in scheduling any necessary appointments at the FQHC and will follow up to increase the number of releasees scheduling follow-up appointments.

## **Component Eleven: Evidence-Based Parole Supervision**

### **Action:**

Another Chance parolees will receive from the State Parole Board evidence-based parole (EBP) supervision that is directed at addressing risks and needs of each offender and utilizes graduated sanctions to address parolee performance to ensure support is given to those presenting the highest risks and needs.

### **Goal:**

- Implement EBP, emphasizing risks/needs assessments; discharge planning; improving educational levels; and success in achieving short and long-term goals.

## **Component Twelve: Using Information Technology to Improve Performance**

### **Action:**

Develop and implement information technology to facilitate interagency information sharing and communication between criminal justice agencies.

### **Goal:**

- Develop and provide information technology for the sharing of reporting and management information between DOC, SPB, LWD and other sources in supporting the reentry effort.

These twelve components form the nucleus of the Another Chance project. Importantly, these components should not be seen as an end point, but rather as the beginning. There is a commitment to rigorously evaluate the outcomes of the Another Chance initiative. Agency senior researchers will collaborate as principal investigators for this evaluation. The focus of the evaluation will be to determine whether these reentry efforts result in a significant reduction in the re-offense, reconviction and reincarceration rates of project participants. This evaluation will assist the Reentry Coordinator in a process of continuous quality improvement with New Jersey's reentry efforts. It will facilitate the identification of both demonstrably effective efforts and demonstrably ineffective efforts and allow the focusing of resources on those things that "work." This knowledge should be used to inform how New Jersey's reentry work is expanded.

## V. REENTRY POLICY AND PROGRAM INITIATIVES

The approach of the Another Chance initiative has many advantages for beginning a process of systemic change of New Jersey's reentry efforts. Efforts to improve reentry in New Jersey will not be limited to oversight and the Another Chance initiative, however. As part of its deliberations, the reentry planning group members met with department and agency representatives, municipal authorities and community providers serving reentering offenders to hear their ideas and proposals about how New Jersey could improve its reentry efforts. The following program and policy initiatives are being undertaken based on careful consideration of needs and limitations, and review of those ideas and proposals.

### **Vocational Training**

Perhaps no single factor is as important to the successful community reintegration of an ex-offender as a job. Research has consistently demonstrated that ex-offenders who become gainfully employed are significantly less likely to commit new crimes than unemployed ex-offenders. Periods of imprisonment provide a unique opportunity to prepare offenders for the workplace, particularly with respect to developing the knowledge, skills and abilities needed by jobs in demand. It is important that when an inmate completes a training program in prison they receive a meaningful credential recognized by employers - the same one that students at county vocational-technical schools receive -- instead of a separate certificate of completion issued by the prison, which might not be recognized by employers.

**Action Step #4:** *The Department of Labor and Workforce Development will provide the Department of Corrections (DOC) with information on occupations in demand by employers and will examine vocational programs taught in DOC's correctional institutions to determine if they meet industry requirements in demand occupations. Where they do not, DOC will take action based on these findings and reform their vocational programs to meet industry requirements.*

Focused collaboration of these agencies, and their expertise on workforce needs and vocational training, will further maximize the state's investment in training and workforce readiness in correctional settings.

**Action Step #5:** *The Department of Labor and Workforce Development will work with DOC to enter into agreements with county vocational schools and higher educational institutions to provide training, certification and job placement in the high-demand/high-wage employment areas. The Department of Labor and Workforce Development will also develop a guide to demand occupations that are suitable for the ex-offender population. The guide will identify occupations/industries that are "offender friendly" and as such are more apt to employ an offender who is leaving the institutions. This guide, which can also assist the correctional facilities target their vocational training and can assist One-Stop Career Center staff guiding the ex-offenders in their job search, will be provided to inmates being released from correctional facilities.*

Providing ex-offenders and those that work with them information about demand employment opportunities is key to improving ex-offender employment rates focusing on job searches, and educating ex-offenders regarding job opportunities.

## **Family Reunification**

As noted above, over one-half (58%) of incarcerated men report having at least one child. For men who are incarcerated and who have children, imprisonment causes a significant disruption in their role as adult caregivers to their children. Reestablishing that caregiver relationship is important to the well being of the children and it can be beneficial to the former offenders who are reentering society. The reentry working group is aware of programs, such as the Philadelphia Comprehensive Center for Fathers, that provide an array of services to returning fathers to enable them to support and care for their children. These services can include group and individual counseling, vocational and job readiness training and employment assistance. When successful, such programs improve offender employment, reduce offender recidivism and enhance the well being of children involved.

**Action Step #6:** *The Reentry Coordinator, assisted by the Reentry Coordinating Council, working in conjunction with the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, will encourage the development of comprehensive fatherhood programs, beginning in the cities involved in the Another Chance demonstration project, as components the State's broader reentry initiatives.*

## **Photo Identification**

The importance of a valid and recognized photographic identification card cannot be understated. Ex-inmates require such identification for employment, housing, to open a bank account, and for a variety of other purposes related to reentry. The provision of a valid, recognized photo identification card for inmates being released from state prisons should not be limited to inmates participating in the Another Chance initiative. Juveniles being released from Juvenile Justice Commission facilities and programs should also receive a valid, recognized photo identification card.

**Action Step #7:** *The Department of Corrections will continue to issue a photo identification card to every inmate being released from its custody. The Juvenile Justice Commission will do the same for every adolescent leaving one of the Commission's secure facilities or residential programs. The Department of Corrections, the Juvenile Justice Commission, the State Parole Board and the Motor Vehicle Commission will establish a Memorandum of Understanding wherein the Department's and the Commission's photo identification cards will be recognized by the Motor Vehicle Commission as valid and legitimate forms of identification.*

## **Community Supervision for All Ex-Inmates**

Within statutorily defined parameters, currently the State Parole Board has the authority to release state inmates based on the Board's assessment of the risk that an offender will commit a new crime, if released. Inmates released by the Board are released to a term of community supervision administered by the State Parole Board's Division of Parole. During this term of parole supervision, parolees are subject to random drug testing, unannounced home visits and curfew checks, and surveillance to

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determine compliance with any terms of supervision set by the Parole Board. Parolees are also offered support with employment, housing, and other reentry needs. During the term of parole supervision, parolees can be returned to prison for technical violations of parole after the initiation and completion of a parole revocation process.

Parole supervision and support can improve the reentry of ex-inmates and result in the reincarceration of ex-inmates who are not adjusting well, before they commit a new crime. These actions protect public safety. Ironically, however, the inmates who pose the greatest threats to public safety, those whom the Parole Board has not released because they were deemed a risk to commit a new crime, are released from state prison without any form of parole supervision. These inmates serve their complete sentence in prison – they “max out” – and walk out the prison door without any form of community supervision. Other offenders “max out” due to extended parole ineligibility periods, known as mandatory minimums or because they refuse parole or time credits reduce their sentence to the mandatory minimum.

**Action Step #8:** *The Commission on Government Efficiency and Reform’s Sentencing/Corrections Task Force, working in conjunction with the Department of Corrections and the State Parole Board, will evaluate the costs associated with establishing some type of community supervision for a period of time for all appropriate state prison inmates who are released at expiration of sentence and recommend a type of community supervision for a reasonable time period that balances costs incurred against potential public safety protections.*

### **Law Enforcement Information Sharing and Collaboration**

Law enforcement agencies have come to recognize that communication and collaboration can enhance law enforcement effectiveness – communication and collaboration between law enforcement agencies at the state, county, and municipal levels, and communication and collaboration with the communities that law enforcement agencies are charged with protecting. The Department of Law and Public Safety’s Operation Ceasefire initiative is one way in which law enforcement agencies and communities are communicating and collaborating to improve public safety. The Division of Parole in the State Parole Board and the Juvenile Parole and Transitional Services Division of the Juvenile Justice Commission, which have statutory responsibility to supervise offenders reentering communities, have vital roles to play in these efforts. If advised, local law enforcement agencies can assist by advising the Bureau and the Division when parolees violate the terms of their supervision.

**Action Step #9:** *The Division of Parole and the Juvenile Parole and Transitional Services Division will actively participate in Operation Ceasefire and in other collaborative efforts designed to enhance public safety. The Division of Parole and the Juvenile Parole and Transitional Services Division will establish, within legal limits, information sharing protocols with State and local law enforcement agencies that advance public safety, such as advising these agencies of parolee supervision requirements.*



## Reducing Gang Involvement

The increasing involvement of organized groups and gangs in crimes of violence is a pernicious problem that undermines the safety and security of our communities. For many offenders, involvement with gangs was a precipitating factor that led to the criminal activity that resulted in their incarceration. For inmates being released from state prison back into the community, gangs can exert an inexorable pull back into a life of crime. Ex-offenders who genuinely want to renounce their membership in a gang and assume a law-abiding lifestyle face significant obstacles. For many, returning to the same community where they were once an active gang member makes it especially difficult to escape that gang's grasp. For others, gang tattoos are an inescapable outward sign of gang membership. The Department of Correction's Security Threat Group Management Unit offers a program for incarcerated gang members that attempts to get them to renounce their gang membership. However, support for former inmates who are sincere in their desire to renounce their gang membership once they have been released is limited.

**Action Step #10:** *When the State Parole Board determines that a parolee who has been properly identified by the Department of Corrections' gang identification process is genuinely seeking to remove themselves from a gang or renounce their membership in a gang, the State Parole Board will, to the fullest extent possible, support that parolee's efforts and offer resources to assist that parolee. These resources will contain, but not be limited to:*

- availability to move their approved address location to a less threatening District Office;
- transitional housing assistance;
- mentoring services;
- educational/treatment programming; and
- employment training/job referrals, using One-Stop Career Center resources.

## VI. LEGISLATIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

Various studies of reentry issues have concluded that certain statutes and administrative policies can present roadblocks to successful reentry and reintegration. These include professional licensing restrictions and disqualifications. They also include other collateral issues that attend criminal sentencing, such as fines, penalties, and driver's license suspension. Thought of more broadly, they include private and public employment policies and hiring practices regarding ex-offenders. Incarcerated persons also may accrue child support arrearages while in prison and face motor vehicle surcharges and penalties, thus leaving prison owing thousands in debt.

Moreover, the easy access to electronic criminal records due to technological advances and private databases has increased the reliance on these records in hiring decisions. Ex-offenders – even those with isolated convictions years old -- may experience substantial, and sometimes lifelong, difficulties in the employment, housing and treatment arenas because of their criminal records. Many of these ex-offenders are unable to avail themselves of expungement because they are statutorily ineligible due to the nature of their convictions, such as drug distribution related offenses, or because they are unable to negotiate through the processes required for expungement.

On the other hand, statutes and policies that limit the opportunities of ex-offenders, or single them out for different treatment, typically were created to protect public safety, or are consequences of criminal

convictions designed to deter criminal activity or to support criminal justice programming, including victim assistance. Considered in the aggregate, the effect of these various restrictions and requirements may make successful reentry and reintegration more difficult. Ultimately, then, these requirements may not serve their public safety goals, or may have the opposite effect in some cases, since, for example, they make finding legitimate employment more difficult.

For this reason, developing legislative options that allow ex-offenders the right opportunity to succeed while protecting the public safety goals underlying these restrictions requires a careful balancing. Some options to temper the consequences of these restrictions are described below.

## **Legislative Issue #1: Addressing employment disqualifiers through measured relief from some collateral sanctions**

Statutes, regulations and policies restrict employment options for ex-offenders. These include licensing disqualification and other statutory employment restrictions, for a variety of jobs. Affected occupations include cosmetology, school employment, bank employment, and real estate, among others. Similarly, work in restaurants serving alcohol and in port warehouse areas also is restricted for ex-offenders.

New Jersey already has a means by which certain ex-offenders may be given relief from disqualifiers regarding licensing. In 1968, New Jersey adopted what is known as the Rehabilitated Convicted Offenders Act, which provides a potential avenue of relief to employment consequences regarding professional licensing and prohibits licensing authorities from disqualifying candidates based on their criminal records, under certain circumstances. At the same time, it allows, among other things, probation and parole agencies to award a certificate of good conduct to the offender if they find that the offender has established rehabilitation. Appropriately, the Act excludes law enforcement positions. The State Parole Board's regulations govern the Board's grant of such relief, but it reports that it receives few applications pursuant to the Act.

Some states have adopted more comprehensive schemes to allow relief in a broader range of cases, including allowing courts and supervisory agencies with authority to issue certificates or orders that restrict the ability of licensing authorities and certain employers to deny employment solely on the basis of the prior conviction, although the offender's history remains a part of his criminal record and available to the public. The relief allowed pursuant to the Rehabilitated Convicted Offenders Act should be expanded to cover a broader range of circumstances, consistent with public safety. Moreover, other collateral consequences that are not closely tied to public safety should be modified, including certain employment disqualifiers and driver's license issues.

## **Legislative Issue #2: Modifying expungement requirements as a means of enhancing employment options**

Expungement is a process by which criminal records are sealed from public view, although the records remain available for certain law enforcement purposes. The law provides that persons granted an expungement may answer "no" to the question of whether they have been convicted of a crime, except in certain limited circumstances. This relief then is of great importance to those seeking employment, given

that employment applications very typically ask for a candidate's criminal history. In New Jersey, first offenders, who were convicted of certain, typically non-violent, offenses, who have had not had another criminal conviction may apply for expungement ten years after conviction or the completion of their sentence, whichever is later. In regard to juveniles, the waiting period is five years from the expiration of sentence, which now includes a period of post-incarcerative supervision of up to one-third of the sentence.

New Jersey's expungement statute, which notably was codified before the increase in drug crimes that began in the 1980s and the adoption of the Comprehensive Drug Reform Act in 1987, specifically precludes expungement for drug distribution offenses, except those involving very small amounts of marijuana and hashish. This preclusion applies to convictions for possession with the intent to sell and it applies to distribution that is accomplished without an exchange of something of value, i.e., sharing with a friend. It also applies regardless of the passage of time, or evidence of positive rehabilitation. Because drug distribution is among the most common criminal convictions, this preclusion has a far-reaching effect.

Review of other states' expungement laws reveals that a number have broader expungement laws that do not preclude lower level drug distribution offenses, while other states provide alternative vehicles or means of relief from the collateral consequences. Moreover, many other states have shorter time periods for expungement.

New Jersey's strict requirements for expungement could be tempered in a number of ways regarding non-violent offenders. First, the statute could be amended to vest courts with discretion to grant expungement to those convicted of third and fourth degree drug distribution offenses. This provision should be subject to all of the other requirements of expungement, including that ten years has passed from the time of conviction or release from incarceration and supervision and that prosecutors and law enforcement have input, as well as an additional requirement that the expungement be found to be consistent with the public interest.

Courts should also be given limited authority to grant expungement in a shorter time period under limited circumstances for certain offenders. Moreover, judges should be allowed to exclude the time period during which the ex-offender had satisfied all aspects of his sentence except payment of fines, which may be satisfied through a payment plan, where the payment plan was honored or where there were compelling circumstances precluding earlier satisfaction of the fines.

It also is proposed that changes be made to the requirements for expungement of juvenile records. Current law requires juvenile offenders to wait five years from the time of adjudication or the completion of their sentence, whichever is longer, to be granted relief. The Juvenile Justice Act of 1994 required judges to impose post-incarcerative terms of supervision for a period of one-third of the sentence imposed. This provision effectively extended the period that juveniles must wait until being eligible for expungement. This period of supervision could be removed from the time period required for expungement.

In addition to these recommended statutory changes, other non-legislative steps will be taken to enhance the effectiveness of expungement. The Office of the Public Defender, the Department of Corrections and the State Parole Board will provide information about the availability of expungement to offenders as a routine matter. Moreover, ex-offenders will be advised of the assistance that Legal Services and law schools can provide to applicants for expungement. Legal service agencies, probation departments and community corrections providers are encouraged to continue their efforts in this regard.

## **Legislative Issue #3: Modification of certain payment requirements for fines and penalties**

In the nearly thirty years since the adoption of Title 2C, a broad range of mandatory fines, penalties and assessments have been added to the Code's sentencing provisions. For example, review of N.J.S.A. 2C:46-4.1, which creates the priority of fines and penalties that apply to persons convicted of crimes, lists eleven types of assessments. These include laboratory fees, probation supervision fees, Victims of Crime Compensation Board penalties, Drug Enforcement and Demand Reduction penalties, and Law Enforcement Training and Equipment penalties. Depending on the offense, offenders may also be ordered to pay restitution to crime victims. As direct compensation to the victim for harm inflicted from the crime, restitution must remain a first priority for payment.

Generally, these fines and penalties fund programs that directly or indirectly support public safety, or make the criminal responsible for certain of the expenses associated with his or her rehabilitation – appropriate and worthy goals. However, their aggregate effect may be that some ex-offenders are never able to satisfy the assessments, which eventually may be reduced to a judgment. These unpaid assessments, therefore, may contribute to the difficulties so many ex-offenders face in attaining self-sustenance, including difficulties obtaining legitimate employment. This is so even though courts already have the discretion to order payment plans that take into account the ability to pay. While this avoids default, it leaves some ex-offenders with debts that they will never be able to satisfy, or which will take many years to satisfy. Currently, courts may allow juvenile offenders to work off a portion of their penalties through community service.

Based on the issues stated above, more extensive study is required to determine the best ways to reconcile the issues raised by these monetary assessments against their aggregate impact on certain offenders. Nevertheless, certain immediate actions seem appropriate.

Limited action should be pursued regarding the Drug Enforcement and Demand Reduction (DEDR) penalty, a mandatory penalty enacted as a part of the Comprehensive Drug Reform Act of 1987. It is assessed upon conviction of a drug related offense. It is the most expensive of the assessments, and is required to be imposed on a per-conviction basis, except in very limited circumstances. For third-degree crimes, \$1,000 is assessed, for second-degree crimes, \$2,000 is assessed, and for first-degree crimes, \$3,000 is assessed. Because these amounts are assessed on a per-conviction basis, to some extent the total penalty amount may depend on variables such as plea bargaining and prosecutorial charging discretion. Given this, it is recommended that courts be given limited discretion to modify DEDR penalties in multiple count cases involving an inability to pay, and where such order is otherwise appropriate. It is further proposed that the courts be given some limited discretion to order reformatory service that assists reintegration as a means to satisfy a portion of the DEDR penalty assessments, such as through completion of service, training or treatment that furthers the offender's successful reintegration.

## **Legislative Issue #4: Provide measured relief for certain license suspension/revocation provisions**

The Criminal Code provides that judges may suspend a driver's license in sentencing a defendant, in the court's discretion. For drug offenses, however, the Criminal Code requires license suspension as a part of the sentence unless compelling circumstances are found by the court. The impact of mandatory drivers' license suspensions has been reported in a number of studies regarding reentry and also in the motor vehicle

task force report. In a state such as New Jersey, where public transportation outside of urban centers is limited, and where jobs are often located in areas outside of cities, license suspensions can prevent reentering offenders from obtaining or maintaining employment. Furthermore, regardless of geography, license suspensions also prevent employment that requires a license due to the nature of the work, i.e., where driving is a job requirement. Moreover, ex-offenders are cut off from commercial driving opportunities.

Of course, license suspensions do not just occur pursuant to the criminal code. Instead, they may be imposed as a result of motor vehicle infractions, or for failure to make a court appearance for a traffic violation, or for failure to pay surcharges or fines. While courts may order payment plans to allow persons to satisfy these penalties over a limited time period, such fines and penalties can mount for incarcerated persons and those recently released and attempting to become financially sound.

The compelling circumstances exception noted above was recently adopted by the Legislature, and provides some measured discretion in regard to license suspensions. Two statutory amendments that logically follow from the legislative change already adopted are proposed:

1. specifically authorizing a court to rescind a license suspension after sentencing, where a defendant can show compelling circumstances, and requiring courts to advise defendants of this right at sentencing, and
2. extending the exception to persons whose drug charges are conditionally discharged and to those subject to other drivers license suspensions mandated by the criminal code. In regard to this issue, expansion of this limited discretion to those who receive a conditional discharge seems appropriate since only first offenders are eligible for conditional discharge, which does not constitute a conviction.

In addition, measures giving courts additional discretion in allowing longer time frames for satisfaction of payments in appropriate cases should be supported.

## **Legislative Issue #5: Expanding Drug Court Eligibility**

As is commonly known, a large proportion of inmates are drug-involved, and involved in drug-related crime. Thirty-two percent of those incarcerated are committed for drug crimes. The drug court program diverts addicted offenders, many of whom would face state prison, to drug treatment. The program has had a very good success rate. In 2007 the New Jersey Commission to Review Criminal Sentences made recommendations to expand the program for offenders who face mandatory incarceration. These recommendations should be adopted in order to afford more addicted non-violent offenders access to drug treatment with court supervision. The recommendations include: allowing persons with more than one offense to apply to the program; give courts more discretion in determining treatment options; and authorizing early discharge from special probation for individuals who make exceptional progress.

## **VII. JUVENILE REENTRY**

As difficult as the problem of reentry is for adults being released from state prisons, the challenges for adolescents being released from Juvenile Justice Commission (JJC) programs and facilities are typically even more complex. Juveniles enmeshed in the deep end of the juvenile justice system have often failed at school, had significant family problems, and are more likely to have a mental health or substance abuse problem than the typical adolescent. As adolescents, these youngsters are not fully matured or capable of living independently. Often, return to school is a principal life goal, rather than employment.



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The JJC is statutorily obligated to provide a thorough and efficient education to every juvenile in its care and custody. Additionally, the JJC operates a variety of treatment programs (including substance abuse and mental health programs) and vocational training programs. The JJC's Office of Juvenile Parole and Transitional Services (OJPTS) operates similarly to the adult Division of Parole. OJPTS is staffed by parole officers with law enforcement powers who attempt to balance the "surveillance" aspects of supervision – random drug testing, curfew checks, monitoring compliance with terms of community supervision – with the "support" functions – assisting juveniles to return to school, get a job, etc.

To assess juvenile reentry, reentry planning group members met with staff at the Juvenile Justice Commission and with community corrections providers, faith-based leaders and other community members working with adolescents returning to communities from JJC facilities and programs.

### **Education**

As noted above, education is a foundation for success. Presently, the JJC receives funding to support a full educational program for all residents through age 21 years who have not yet received a high school diploma or a general equivalency degree (GED). Juveniles in the custody of the JJC should be encouraged to earn their high school diploma or GED as soon as possible and, if possible, to continue to pursue higher education or vocational training.

**Action Step #11:** *The JJC will establish an "educational incentive program" that will encourage residents to reach the highest level of educational achievement possible.*

### **Involvement of Families**

As important as maintaining family relationships is for adult offenders, it is even more critical for juveniles, the majority of whom return to families and depend on families for support. Maintaining relationships between juveniles placed in JJC secure facilities and residential programs and their families can ease the transition of adolescents back into their communities and improve reentry success. Since many adolescents in JJC facilities and programs have experienced troubled and dysfunctional family relationships, maintaining contact between adolescents in out-of-home placements and their families can also facilitate a process of improving those relationships. Yet many of the JJC's facilities are not accessible by public transportation, making it difficult for families without automobiles to visit.

**Action Step #12:** *The Juvenile Justice Commission will use teleconferencing as a means of permitting family members to play an active role in the reentry planning of their children. Teleconferencing capability will be established at the JJC's Parole and Transitional Services offices, many of which are easily accessible to families.*

### **Transitional Step-Down Programming**

The JJC opened its first transitional residential program for adolescents being released from secure correctional facilities in April 2007. This transitional program provides a short term (i.e., 30 day) "step down" facility where adolescents are linked to community-based services, such as counseling, substance abuse treatment, vocational training, and education. The facility allows juveniles to begin

community adjustment in a supervised and structured setting. This transitional facility is in Mercer County, and serves youngsters returning to that county. While it is too early to know whether the use of this facility improves the reentry outcomes for juveniles who transition through it, the reentry working group believes that this type of facility holds great promise.

**Action Step #13:** *The JJC will open similar transitional step-down facilities in Essex and Camden counties, where large numbers of juveniles committed to the JJC return each year.*

## **Vocational Training and Job Placement**

Educational achievement and job skills are two factors that are strongly related to reentry success. The JJC operates four secure facilities, 14 residential group centers and six day centers. Vocational training programs and teachers are scattered amongst these various programs and facilities. It is important that JJC's vocational training programs be tied to workforce demand and that training curriculums are recognized by national accreditation bodies. Juveniles in the care and custody of the JJC should also be offered as many vocational training opportunities as possible and appropriate.

**Action Step #14:** *The JJC, in collaboration with the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, will restructure its vocational training programs to closely align course offerings to workforce demand occupations, maximize resident training opportunities and align curriculums with national standards.*

Many juveniles in JJC secure facilities and residential programs reach the age of majority before being released. For these individuals, job placement, rather than return to school, may be a principle reentry goal. Often these individuals have not explored vocational interests and aptitudes and have little or no work experience. These individuals require assistance in career exploration, job readiness, and job placement. While the JJC can begin this process, there must be a continuity of effort post-release that involves the Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

**Action Step #15:** *The Juvenile Justice Commission and Department of Labor and Workforce Development will work collaboratively to:*

- provide the services of a One-Stop Career Center at the New Jersey Training School for Boys;
- integrate the One-Stop Career Centers into the work of the JJC in ways that meet the particular needs of offenders returning from JJC facilities and programs; and
- employ innovative and creative ways of facilitating the employment of JJC releasees.

## **Juvenile Involvement in Pre-Release Planning**

As with adults released from state prisons, the active involvement of juveniles in pre-release planning can enhance reentry success. When adolescents are involved in a process that requires them to set attainable goals and to articulate the action steps that they need to take in order to achieve those goals, they return to their communities with a clearer understanding of what is expected of them and what they need to do.

**Action Step #16:** *The JJC will establish a pre-release center on the grounds of the Commission's largest secure facility, the New Jersey Training School for Boys. Residents of JJC secure facilities who are nearing release will be transitioned through this center, where staff would actively engage residents in a pre-release planning process that involves family members.*

## **Specialized Reentry Services for Juveniles with Mental Health Needs**

A significant number of adolescents committed to the care and custody of the JJC have mental health needs. Unless these mental health needs are addressed, juveniles returning to communities are likely to continue to experience the type of adjustment problems that may well have led to their delinquency in the first place. The JJC has implemented specialized mental health treatment programs for juveniles committed to the care and custody of the Commission. Continuity of care upon release is a critical need to ensure successful reentry.

**Action Step #17:** *The JJC will implement an initiative designed to ensure that juveniles released from JJC programs and facilities are linked to appropriate community-based mental health treatment resources including services of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services.*

## **Collaborative Pre-Release Planning**

Adolescents involved with the juvenile justice system typically present with a multitude of problems and are often involved in multiple child-serving systems. These juveniles typically are experiencing educational problems, may be involved in the child welfare system, and may have substance abuse and mental health problems. Effective reentry planning involves getting all of the departments and agencies that are involved with the juvenile to communicate and collaborate in the development of a coordinated release plan that will address the juvenile's risks and needs.

**Action Step #18:** *The Reentry Coordinator, assisted by the Coordinating Council will work with all State departments and agencies involved in providing services to youths and developing discharge plans that clearly articulate which agency is responsible for each piece of the discharge plan.*

## Endnotes

1. The Department of Corrections' inmate population actually peaked at 31,299 in August, 1999 and declined thereafter. Since May, 2001 the inmate population has remained relatively stable at its current level.
2. Petersilia, Joan. *When Prisoners Come Home*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, England, 2003, p. 3.
3. "The Ohio Plan for Productive Offender Reentry and Recidivism Reduction," Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, Columbus, Ohio, July 2002, p. 4.
4. Travis, Jeremy, Keegan, Sinead, and Cadora, Eric. *A Portrait of Prisoner Reentry in New Jersey*. The Urban Institute, Washington, D.C., 2003.
5. An additional 4.3% of 2006 releases of committed juveniles involved recalls or transfers to the Department of Corrections.
6. Cohort size estimates are based on the numbers of inmates returning to Newark, Camden and Trenton from these four facilities during the previous twelve months. Actual cohort size will be determined based on the number of eligible inmates being discharged from these four facilities to these cities during project implementation.