



State of New Jersey

STATE PAROLE BOARD

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New Partnership Will Help Female Ex-Prisoners Turn Away From Crime, Become Self-Sufficient

TRENTON – State Parole Board Chairman Yolette C. Ross and State Division on Women Director Janice L. Kovach today launched the NJ Women’s Reentry & Employment Partnership, which will help female ex-prisoners turn away from crime and develop stable lives.

“Women are the fastest-growing population in America’s prisons, and they face unique barriers when they return to society,” Parole Chairman Ross said. “Governor Corzine’s crime plan recognizes the need for evidence-based reentry programs that help ex-offenders become law-abiding citizens. These programs provide a clear benefit for public safety.”

Director Kovach, of the State Department of Community Affairs’ Division on Women, said, “Our Job Training Centers for Urban Women provide employment services, to help women become economically self-sufficient. Our partnership with the State Parole Board will help women in Camden and Mercer counties build new lives after prison – which will benefit their families and communities, and prevent future crimes.”

“This program will be a positive, life altering experience for these women,” said Department of Community Affairs Commissioner Joseph Doria. “By helping them with employment services, the Division on Women is playing a key role in ensuring that these women become active, contributing members to their community.”

Ross and Kovach signed the Women’s Reentry & Employment Partnership today, in a public ceremony at the State House. The partnership will expand the State Parole Board’s existing gender-responsive reentry initiative from Essex County, where it began, into Camden and Mercer counties. It will serve an estimated 140 parolees in Camden County and an estimated 90 parolees in Mercer County each year, in addition to other female ex-offenders who are not under State Parole Board supervision.

Beginning immediately, the State Parole Board will enroll female parolees in the Division on Women’s Camden and Mercer County Job Training Centers for Urban Women. Additionally, the non-profit Nicholson Foundation will fund the hiring of two resource specialists, who will help ensure the female parolees become ready for stable employment.

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The Job Training Centers for Urban Women provide job counseling, training and placement services, specifically designed to prepare women for the workforce. They also connect women with academic counseling, mentoring, childcare, health and other programs. Their goal is to help women achieve self-sufficiency.

The new partnership will serve as an important expansion of the State Parole Board's Female Offender Reentry Group Effort (FORGE), based in Essex County.

The FORGE initiative draws upon national research, and on the observations of New Jersey parole officers. Nationally, women are the fastest-growing segment of the prison population. Two-thirds of incarcerated women are the mothers of minor children. Research cited by the US Department of Justice's National Institute of Corrections shows that when they return to the community, female ex-prisoners face unique psychological and economic barriers. These barriers impede their successful reentry, creating the risk for new crimes.

In 2008, FORGE assisted 572 female ex-offenders, by helping them obtain birth certificates and other forms of identification necessary for employment and housing; and by connecting them with job training, education, food, housing and medical assistance. FORGE provides these services in a gender-specific setting at Essex County College.

The New Jersey State Parole Board (SPB) is New Jersey's lead reentry agency, and works to ensure ex-prisoners return to society as law-abiding citizens. As required by law, appointed Parole Board Members and staff conduct more than 20,000 hearings per year, solicit input from victims and decide parole matters. SPB sworn parole officers supervise more than 15,000 offenders statewide. In addition, SPB is New Jersey's primary law enforcement agency responsible for sex offender supervision. SPB officers are also active partners with multiple Federal, State and local law enforcement agencies and task forces. Finally, SPB's Community Programs Unit partners with government, non-profit and private agencies to connect ex-prisoners with vocational, mental health and related services, targeted to break the cycle and risk of crime.

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