



## State of New Jersey

### STATE PAROLE BOARD

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# Media Release

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## **NJ Parole Program Garner's National Innovations Award** *Regional Assessment Centers (RACs), Unique to New Jersey, Earn Prestigious Council of State Governments Award*

TRENTON – The Council of State Governments on Sunday, August 2, 2009 honored a New Jersey parole program with the prestigious Innovations Award, recognizing New Jersey's leadership in ex-offender reentry initiatives.

Each year, the Council of State Governments honors eight state-based initiatives nationwide with the Innovations Award. New Jersey's award recognizes the success of the Regional Assessment Centers (RACs) developed in a partnership between the New Jersey State Parole Board and Governor Corzine's Government Accountability and Reform (GEAR) Commission. The program, in Newark and Trenton, is delivered in partnership with Community Education Centers, a private provider.

State Parole Board Chairman Yolette C. Ross said, "True to Governor Corzine's focus on reentry, the RAC is an example of innovative thinking. It successfully promotes New Jersey's public safety while reducing a burden on the State budget. We are proud of this Innovations Award, and would encourage other states to learn from what New Jersey has accomplished."

State Parole Board Executive Director Joseph M. Shields, a member of the GEAR Commission task force that helped develop the RAC, said, "The RAC represents a significant step forward in parole policy. It appears to be the first model of its kind in which a paroling authority uses its law enforcement process as an opportunity for intervention and clinical assessment of high-risk parolees. As a result, the agency is making better-informed decisions about the continued supervision of these technical violators."

The RAC program was created as an investment in public safety, and a method to save taxpayer dollars by reducing the rate at which technical parole violators are returned to incarceration. Technical parole violators are parolees who have violated the rules of supervision, but have not been charged with a new crime. Their at-risk behavior is usually consistent with addiction, and indicates that enhanced supervision and community-based programming are an appropriate law enforcement response.

By allowing the State Parole Board to divert technical parole violators into appropriate supervision and away from incarceration, the RAC program saved New Jersey more than \$2 million during the last fiscal year and is expected to prevent \$14 million in incarceration costs during Fiscal 2010. The State Parole Board launched the program in July 2008.

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The Council of State Governments Innovations Awards are chosen based on each nominated initiative's newness, creativity, effectiveness, transferability to other states, and significance in addressing regional issues.

The award for New Jersey's RAC initiative is one of eight Innovations Awards the Council of State Governments will present this year, and one of two announced August 2 at the 49<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting and Regional Policy Forum of the Council's Eastern Regional Conference, held in Burlington, Vermont.

The Council of State Governments is our nation's only organization serving all three branches of state government. CSG is a region-based forum that fosters the exchange of insights and ideas to help state officials shape public policy. This offers unparalleled regional, national and international opportunities to network, develop leaders, collaborate and create problem-solving partnerships.

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's 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 of recidivism and reduce risk of crime.

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