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Unlikely Allies Announce Transformational Plan for Successful Reentry from Prison

Experts agree on framework that will prepare people to successfully return from prison and lead more productive, healthier lives

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Stakeholders with a broad range of roles and experience in criminal justice and related fields today unveiled their comprehensive plan to support the hundreds of thousands of people returning home from jail and prison each year. This plan is designed to help incarcerated individuals lead healthy, successful lives when they come home, which will result in stronger communities, greater public safety, and better allocation of public resources. By focusing on what happens during incarceration and immediately afterward, the plan addresses a critical, yet often overlooked, element of needed criminal justice reform.

“At current rates, over 40 percent of individuals released from prison or jail will return in three years. The economic and social benefits of successful reentry can be game changing, not only for formerly incarcerated individuals and their families, but also for local communities, states, and the entire country,” according to the Reentry Report.

The 24 members of the Reentry Ready project brought together by Convergence Center for Policy Resolution agreed that improved coordination among actors involved in incarceration and reentry is key to achieving better outcomes. This unique group includes public and private prison officials, corrections officers, experts in mental and physical health, direct service providers, the faith community, education advocates, researchers, criminal justice experts, and right and left-leaning advocacy groups.

“At the National Governors Association, we recognize that governors play a critical role in efforts to implement smarter, fairer and more cost-effective criminal-justice policies. Governors have championed reforms that improve reentry practices and prepare individuals to return to their communities from incarceration,” said Jeffrey S. McLeod, Director of Homeland Security and Public Safety Division, National Governors Association. “I applaud the Convergence Reentry Ready project for highlighting strategies that governors and other state, local, and community leaders can utilize for a collaborative system-wide approach to achieve better outcomes for the hundreds of thousands of individuals returning to our communities from incarceration, as well as reduce recidivism and improve public safety for all communities.”

The Reentry Ready recommendations call for corrections officials to develop individualized reentry plans, based on a person’s specific needs and challenges, when they first come into contact with the criminal justice system. Each plan will be designed to put supports in place that lead to improved health outcomes, increased employment opportunities, stable housing, and

stronger family and community connections. This critical first step must occur to set the stage for improved outcomes when they return home.

These plans require a “warm handoff” from jail/prison to community-based resources so returning individuals have the support they need to complete their reentry plan. It is also necessary to remove barriers such as excessive fines and fees, challenging conditions of release, and harsh penalties for minor violations that have the unintended consequence of making successful reentry more difficult.

While the corrections system must play a leadership role in implementing these recommendations, it does not have the resources or authority to accomplish these alone. Top state and local leaders must support this collaboration. It will require new incentives and mandates to break through existing silos and ensure that resources are used effectively.

“Gaining common understanding among stakeholders on what needs to be done to improve the continuum of services and interventions for the incarcerated who are nearing or recently released, as well as understanding what CAN be done has been incredibly valuable. While the proposed interventions are good ideas, most are impossible without significant restructuring and adequate resources. This report offers a guide that local practitioners, like those in my home state of Louisiana, can follow and achieve positive results,” said Rhett Covington, Assistant Secretary, Louisiana Department of Corrections.

The report highlights examples of successful programs and strategies already taking place in correctional facilities and communities that can serve as models as states and systems work to improve the reentry process.

“The solutions/recommendations we generated are innovative and have the potential to be widely adopted by outside groups and organizations. These recommendations will be useful in my state of North Dakota as we look to build on the work that we've done,” said Leann Bertsch, Director, North Dakota Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and Immediate Past President, Association of State Corrections Administrators.

The group is now promoting these ideas to their constituencies, other criminal justice advocates, and elected officials. They stand committed to help communities design and implement programs, including pilot projects, consistent with the strategies in the report. They call upon state and local governments to lead this effort with the involvement of a wide range of private groups, philanthropy and academia.

“The Reentry Ready stakeholders represent a diverse array of groups and perspectives with the collective expertise needed to tackle this complex issue,” said Stephanie McGencey, Director of the Convergence Reentry Ready project. “It is our hope that the breadth and quality of the ideas in this report and the collective effort of those proposing them can help improve the lives of millions of Americans.”

Statements from Reentry Ready Stakeholders

For anyone who does not see the value in reentry programs, ask yourself, what kind of neighbors do we want returning citizens to be when they return home? Investing in returning citizens makes sense. There is no better fix to the ills we see in society than opportunity.”

Brian Ferguson, Director, District of Columbia Mayor's Office on Returning Citizen Affairs (Washington, DC)

"The Convergence Reentry Ready dialogue offered stimulating discussion and surfaced many good ideas in education, employment, housing, family, health, leadership, and financing. I'm pleased with how it all came together, and hope others take these ideas and implement them in their agencies."

Marc Levin, Vice President, Criminal Justice, Texas Public Policy Foundation and Right on Crime (Austin, Texas)

"Every person involved in the criminal justice system has value! The Reentry Ready dialogue process was grounded in our collective belief in the dignity, humanity, and agency of system-involved individuals. I was pleasantly surprised to be a part of a process, with folks from both sides of the aisle, where we could agree and act with these principles in mind."

Ashley McSwain, Executive Director, Community Family Life Services (Washington, DC)

"Stigma and structural racism often place critical support just out of reach of justice-system involved individuals and some guidelines issued by public agencies place formerly incarcerated individuals at the bottom of waiting lists for services already in short supply."

Dr. Keesha Middlemass, Associate Professor, Howard University (Washington, DC)

"Multiple overlapping systems have a role in ensuring that programs and services provided during and after incarceration help individuals involved with the criminal justice system to make a better transition home. Without comprehensive, well-coordinated support they are at high risk of future contact with the criminal justice system, and no one wins when that happens."

Dan Mistak, General Counsel, Community Oriented Correctional Health Services (Oakland, CA)

"We commend this report for its emphasis on coordination between local agencies and between state and local governments. As administrators with various local functions, from criminal justice systems to social service agencies and public health departments, counties can attest that siloed approaches to reentry will likely prove inefficient from a fiscal standpoint and ineffective in helping formerly incarcerated individuals reintegrate into their communities. The blueprint provided in this report for a cross-system approach to reentry can help local officials transcend silos and formulate effective approaches."

Hadi Sedigh, Managing Director, Counties Futures Lab, National Association of Counties (NACo) (Washington, DC)

"Where has Convergence been all this time? The Convergence process gave me an opportunity to share what correctional officers really think about our role in reentry. Too often we are left out of conversations about reentry. Everyone assumes that correctional officers are not invested in effective programs and services inside prisons. On the contrary, we want people to get the help they need to live better, more productive lives and not return to prison."

Stephen Walker, Director, Governmental Affairs, California Correctional Peace Officers Association (Sacramento, CA)

Additional Statements

"We need bold, outside-the-box and cross-cutting solutions to fully address the barriers and challenges that we face with respect to mass incarceration today. This new report by

Convergence offers important recommendations and a starting point for advancing solutions that can help facilitate reentry and reduce recidivism, among other things. To achieve progress, we need ideas that are actionable and coalitions that are new."

Kristen Clarke, President and Executive Director, Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law

Reentry Ready Stakeholders

Leann Bertsch, Director, North Dakota Department of Corrections & Rehabilitation; Past President, Association of State Correctional Administrators (Bismarck, ND)

Mannone Butler, Executive Director, Washington, D.C. Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (Washington, DC)

Rhett Covington, Assistant Secretary, Louisiana Department of Public Safety & Corrections (Baton Rouge, LA)

Craig DeRoche, Senior Vice President, Advocacy & Public Policy, Prison Fellowship (Lansdowne, VA)

Brian Ferguson, Director, District of Columbia Mayor's Office on Returning Citizens Affairs (Washington, DC)

Adam Gelb, President and CEO, Council on Criminal Justice (Atlanta, GA)

Greg Glod, Manager of State Initiatives, Right on Crime (Washington, DC)

Kalyn Hill, Policy Analyst, Homeland Security and Public Safety Division, National Governor's Association (Washington, DC)

Jamila Hodge, Director, Prosecution Reform Program, Vera Institute of Justice (Washington, DC)

Marc Howard, Ph.D., Director, Prisons & Justice Initiative; Professor of Government & Law; Georgetown University (Washington, DC)

Nicole Jarrett, Director, Corrections and Reentry, The Council of State Governments Justice Center (New York, NY)

Marc Levin, Policy Director, Right on Crime; Director, Center for Effective Justice, Texas Public Policy Foundation (Austin, Texas)

Ashley McSwain, Executive Director, Community Family Life Services (Washington, DC)

Keesha Middlemass, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Howard University (Washington, DC)

Daniel Mistak, General Counsel, Community Oriented Correctional Health Services (Oakland, CA)

Megan Quattlebaum, Director, Council of State Governments Justice Center (New York, NY)

David Safavian, Deputy Director, Center for Criminal Justice Reform, American Conservative Union Foundation (Alexandria, VA)

Eric Schultz, Jr., Director, Government & Public Affairs, American Correctional Association (Alexandria, VA)

Hadi Sedigh, Managing Director, Futures Lab, National Association of Counties (Washington, DC)

Daren Swenson, Vice President, Community Corrections Branch, CoreCivic (Nashville, TN)

Faye Taxman, Ph.D., Professor, Criminology, Law and Society and Director of the Center for Advancing Correctional Excellence, George Mason University (Fairfax, VA)

Lars Trautman, Senior Criminal Justice Fellow, R Street Institute (Washington, DC)

Homer Venters, Senior Health and Justice Fellow, Community Oriented Correctional Health Services (New York, NY)

Stephen Walker, Director, Government Relations, California Correctional Peace Officers Association (Sacramento, CA)

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