

## Successful Reentry and The Second Chance Act

Reentry, the period following incarceration or conviction during which a person (adult or juvenile) reintegrates into the community, is a time of paramount importance to both public safety and the rehabilitative process. **Many obstacles stand between the individual with a criminal record and successful reentry.** In fact, studies conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics and other leading researchers conclude that more than two-thirds of the individuals released from prison are rearrested within three years.<sup>1</sup> Policies that create barriers to employment, education, civic participation, public benefits, housing, medical care, and substance abuse treatment, to name a few, make reentry more difficult.

The Second Chance Act of 2007 was signed into law by President George W. Bush to combat the “high recidivism rate [that] places a huge financial burden on taxpayers . . . deprives our labor force of productive workers, and . . . families of their daughters and sons, and husbands and wives, and moms and dads”. The Second Chance Act **authorizes \$165 million in federal aid to state, local, and tribal governments and nonprofit organizations to support programming to assist people exiting incarceration,** including competitive grants to government agencies and nonprofit organizations to provide employment assistance, substance abuse treatment, housing, family services, mentoring, victims support and other services that help reduce recidivism and improve public safety.

Research has demonstrated that these are the types of supports that reduce recidivism and thereby improve public safety while reducing future law enforcement, judicial, and corrections costs not to mention the social and financial costs associated with unemployment, homelessness and untreated addiction. For example:

- Investing in housing opportunities for individuals with criminal records saves money by reducing the number of people who use homeless shelters or live on the streets and decreasing the use of emergency rooms and other expensive crisis services.<sup>2</sup>
- A recent study conducted in Chicago by the American Bar Association Commission on Effective Criminal Sanctions and countless other studies show that individuals with criminal records who are unable to obtain employment are three times more likely to return to prison than those individuals who are able to find work.<sup>3</sup>
- The Washington State Institute for Public Policy estimates that for every dollar spent on community-based drug treatment, society receives a return of \$18.52 in benefits, including reductions in corrections and prosecution costs.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> National Institute of Justice, Recidivism, <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/topics/corrections/recidivism/welcome.htm> (last visited Jan. 18, 2011) (citing Allen J. Beck & Bernard E. Shipley, Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1983, Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report (1989), abstract available at <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=1135>).

<sup>2</sup> National Reentry Resource Center. Frequently Asked Questions: Housing. Available at <http://nationalreentryresourcecenter.org/faqs/housing-and-reentry#Q3>.

<sup>3</sup> ABA Commission on Effective Criminal Sanctions, Second Chances in the Criminal Justice System: Alternatives to Incarceration and Reentry Strategies at 27 (citing Rebuilding Lives. Restoring Hope. Strengthening Communities: Breaking the Cycle of Incarceration and Building Brighter Futures in Chicago. Final Report of the Mayoral Policy Caucus on Prisoner Reentry at 15 (2006)). (2007).

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Drake, et al., Evidence-based Public Policy Options to Reduce Future Prison Construction, Criminal Justice Costs, and Crime Rates, Washington State Inst. for Pub. Policy (2006).