



Offender Reentry in Ohio

The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction

Ted Strickland, Governor

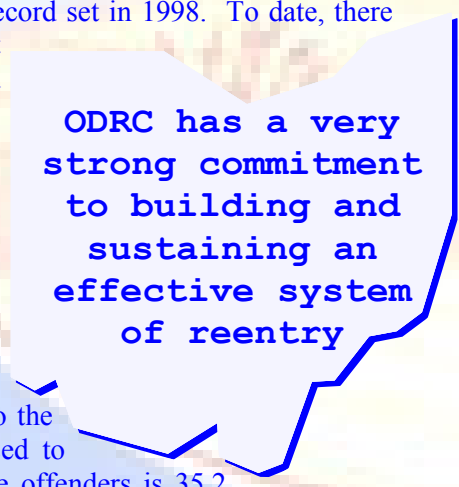
Terry J. Collins, Director

As the field of corrections moves through the first decade of the twenty-first century, it has embarked on a major reexamination of offender reentry. The notion of preparing offenders to return home is not a new concept. But it is being addressed from within a fundamentally different framework or paradigm: one that recognizes corrections cannot continue to go it alone. To do so promises to repeat the failures of the past.

The interest in reentry has been fueled by many factors, including the recognition by legislators, correctional and community leaders, and others that public safety is compromised when hundreds of thousands of prisoners released from institutions are ill-prepared and ill-equipped to succeed in the free world. It is notable that approximately 650,000 offenders will be released annually from state and federal prisons to neighborhoods across the land.

The national average cost of confining a prisoner exceeds \$22,000.00. In Ohio the annual cost to house a prisoner is over \$25,000, and these figures do not account for other criminal justice-related costs or the costs to the victims of crime. These are costs that cannot be sustained in the absence of any meaningful return on the investment. Whether returning offenders become tax payers or tax burdens is largely dependent on their ability to find productive employment, stable housing, and links to vital community services.

The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) has recently seen an increase in the prison population surpassing the record set in 1998. To date, there are 49,488 individuals incarcerated throughout Ohio's adult prison system exceeding the rated capacity of 37,610 beds. Since February 2005, ODRC has seen a prison growth of 5,809 offenders or 13.3%. It is estimated that by July 2009 the prison population will increase to 55,543 offenders. Females comprise 7.82% of the prison population. The total female population is 3,819 offenders. This represents a 4.7% growth since January 1, 2007.



ODRC has a very strong commitment to building and sustaining an effective system of reentry

In FY 2006, 28,448 offenders were released to the community. Less than half (13,904) were released to community supervision. The average age of male offenders is 35.2 years of age while the average age of females is 35 years. The four major crimes of conviction for males are drug possession, drug trafficking, burglary, and theft. For females, they include theft, drug trafficking, drug possession, and forgery. F4 and F5 felony levels comprise 57.3% of the committed crimes. The average length of stay is 2.31 years. Of those admitted 60% serve less than one year, and 55% of these offenders serve less than six months. Approximately 75% of the offender population has a substance abuse problem. In FY 2007, 37,234 offenders received alcohol and drug services during incarceration.

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In Ohio, innovative initiatives have been underway since 2002 that emphasize the building of a continuum of services, programming support, and offender accountability from the time of sentencing well beyond release from prison. The key to these initiatives has been the development of collaborative partnerships with community organizations, service providers, citizens, victims, and ex-offenders. Their ownership and support at the local level have been and will continue to be vital to achieving successful pathways for offender reentry.

In July 2002, the ODRC published a comprehensive report called *The Ohio Plan for Productive Offender Reentry and Recidivism Reduction*. The “Ohio Plan” views reentry as a philosophy, not a program. The plan calls for a broad systems approach to managing offenders returning to the community following a period of incarceration. It calls for a redirection in practice that affects every phase of the correctional process. It contains wide-ranging recommendations centering on reentry planning, programming, family involvement, employment and discharge readiness, offender supervision, and community partnerships.

The major force influencing an offender’s ability to address identified needs whether they are habilitative or programmatic is the Reentry Accountability Plan (RAP). The RAP consists of three components that identify the likelihood of an offender to recidivate through the use of a validated risk instrument, a dynamic needs assessment that focuses on the level of need in seven criminogenic areas, and program recommendations that match appropriate programming with the corresponding needs of the offender.

Significant progress has been made and lessons learned since the adoption of the Ohio Plan five years ago. ODRC continues to learn ways to improve the reentry process through such innovative pilot program models the *Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative-Community Oriented Reentry (CORE)* and the *Prisoner Reentry Initiative-Linking Individuals with New Chances (LINC)*, both federal reentry grants. The CORE grant targeted high risk, serious and violent offenders from Allen, Franklin, and Cuyahoga counties. Ohio was one of fourteen sites selected by the Urban Institute and Research Triangle Institute to

participate in a multi-year evaluation. This evaluation report should be released in 2008. The LINC grant which began in September 2006 is a two year, \$500,000.00 grant focusing on non-violent offenders returning to the Hamilton County area. It is operated in conjunction with Talbert House of Cincinnati.

Another key feature of the Ohio Plan is a commitment to securing family involvement in reentry. ODRC recognizes the value of engaging families and children during an offender’s incarceration. In 2004, the ODRC Family Council was established to assess and develop family friendly strategies that will lead to successful family unification and reentry. In 2005, in collaboration with the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and the Governor’s Office of Faith-Based and Community-Based Initiatives, ODRC launched the *Children of Incarcerated Parents Program* to provide parenting and family services to offenders before and after release from prison. Furthermore, ODRC recently submitted two separate grant proposals, *Healthy Environments Loving Moms (HELM)* and *Keeping Individuals Dedicated to Support (KIDS)*. HELM will address the unique needs of the female offender with children, while KIDS is a pioneering approach to obtaining and maintaining child support payments while encouraging the parent/child relationship.

ODRC recognizes the value of engaging families and children during an offender’s incarceration

Agencies and communities throughout the state have also embraced reentry. This commitment can be clearly seen by the number of collaborative partnerships currently underway. The:

Social Security Administration (SSA) Program is a collaboration between ODRC, SSA, and the Rehabilitation Services Commission (RSC) to link offenders with disabilities to Supplemental Security Income benefits prior to release from prison.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program is a collaborative effort between RSC and ODRC to provide vocational counseling services to offenders with disabilities who are determined to be able to work. ORSC counselors will determine a referred offender's eligibility as prescribed by the Federal Vocational Rehabilitation Guidelines.

Forensic Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) is a service delivery model orchestrated through the Ohio Department of Mental Health, ODRC, and local community mental health agencies that provides comprehensive community-based treatment for released offenders under supervision with the highest level of need due to serious mental illness.

Permanent Supportive Housing Project is a collective effort amongst ODRC and the Corporation for Supportive Housing to provide permanent supportive housing to a target population of offenders who are homeless or will leave prison homeless or are at risk of being homeless because of special needs issues.

Release Identification Project is a cooperative effort involving ODRC, SSA, and the Bureau of Motor Vehicles to provide a release identification card to offenders with a verifiable social security number that is accepted as primary documentation for a valid state driver's license, state identification card or CDL license.

Circle for Recovery Ohio (CFRO) is a joint venture between ODRC, the Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services, and Urban Minority Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Outreach Programs to provide a community-based treatment program.

Community Correction Act Felony Non-Support Initiative is a collaborative initiative between ODRC, nine county Adult Probation Departments, ODJFS, and Child Support Enforcement Agencies to assist nonsupport offenders in obtaining and maintaining employment to divert offenders convicted of non-support from confinement within ODRC.

Joint Commission on Child Support is a partnership between ODRC, the Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS), and the Office of Child Support to develop new, innovative, and effective ways to increase child support payments from offenders.

Returning Home Demonstration/OSFI Projects are a collaboration involving the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community-Based Initiatives, ODRC, ODJFS, and several community agencies to provide comprehensive integrated case management services to ex-offenders and their families.

Cleveland Transition Center is the result of a unique partnership between the City of Cleveland and ODRC which provides assistance for housing, employment, education, cognitive skills, and chemical dependency treatment to Cleveland residents who are returning home.

Citizen Circles are the result of civic engagement by ODRC with community members throughout the state of Ohio to create partnerships that promote positive interaction and accountability for offenders upon release.

University of Cincinnati Risk/Needs Project is a partnership with the University of Cincinnati to develop a universal Risk and Needs Assessment Tool targeting the Ohio Offender Adult Population. The tool will eventually be administered during any phase of an offender's involvement in the criminal justice system.





ODRC has a very strong commitment to building and sustaining an effective system of reentry. An additional initiative, the Community Partners for Reentry Project, draws from House Bill 113, the recommendations from the Correctional Faith-Based Task Force, and the Leadership Forums targeting transitional services supportive of offender reentry. The project involves mobilizing and training faith and community-based volunteers from across the state to connect offenders to housing, employment, family, and pro-social networks.

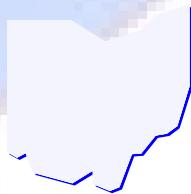
One final example of this commitment is the pursuit of House Bill 130. HB 130 offers a framework for a long-term investment in Ohio's economy by addressing legal and other barriers to employment for people released from prison. A key component of this legislation is the removal of non-relevant prohibitions or collateral sanctions to employment. This proposal provides that conviction of a felony does not by itself constitute grounds for denying employment. Other recommendations include facilitating access to valid forms of identification, establishing state agency partnerships, and reassessing barriers to social services. The bill promotes expanded criminal justice treatment and sentencing options for certain individuals that include, among other things, judicial release and authorization for a reentry court. It also provides for diverting individuals convicted of non-violent offenses to community supervision, allows them to work in the community, maintain family ties, pay child support and other fees, and receive treatment. Finally, the bill calls for the formation of a State Agency Offender Reentry Coalition that will serve as a conduit for Ohio's reentry efforts, better positioning the state to receive future funding under the Second Chance Act of 2007.

Reentry must be done by drawing on programmatic best practices, seeking active collaboration and sustainable community and faith-based partners, engaging families across the full spectrum of reentry, and reducing those barriers that undermine offenders' successful transitions from prison to home. These goals can be accomplished. When coupled with the very vital support of state agencies, community partners, and the citizens of Ohio, we will experience outcomes that create safer communities.

Reentry Means "Going Home to Stay"

For more information about the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction and Offender Reentry, please visit our website at <http://www.drc.state.oh.us>

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