

March 5, 2004

The Honorable Rob Portman
U.S. House of Representatives
238 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Portman:

In his recent State of the Union address President Bush called on Congress to address the reentry crisis that currently finds more than 600,000 persons reentering society each year from state and federal prisons. We write to urge you to respond to this call by passing comprehensive reentry legislation in this Congress.

As President Bush said, **“We know from long experience that if they can’t find work, or a home, or help, they are much more likely to commit more crimes and return to prison.”** A 2002 study by the Justice Department’s Bureau of Justice Statistics found that sixty-seven percent of prisoners released from state prisons in 1994 were arrested for a new crime within the first three years.

Few of the 600,000 were prepared for their release and few receive any supportive services whatsoever beyond a bus ticket and a few day’s spending money. One-third of all corrections departments provide no funds to prisoners upon release. Many of the 600,000 are homeless as soon as they are released or soon afterwards.

Today’s unacceptably high recidivism rate and the threat it poses to public safety can be significantly reduced to better protect the public, save money, and redeem wasted lives. Diane Williams, President of the Safer Foundation in Chicago, points out, “Ninety-seven percent of the people who go into prison are coming home. We have a choice. We can say come home worse than you went in and do what you have to do to survive. Or we can say, we will not feed you, but we will provide you with support systems that will help you to help yourself.” Loyola University found that former prisoners who went through Safer Foundation programs had a recidivism rate less than half that of other prisoners released from prison at the same time. A major May 2001 study conducted for the state legislature by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy found that, “...the best programs can be expected to deliver 20 to 30 percent reductions in recidivism or crime rates” and that “...programs that can deliver – at a reasonable program cost – even modest reductions in future criminality can have an attractive economic bottom line.”

Over the past two years the Department of Justice’s Serious and Violent Offender Initiative has provided small grants to the states to improve reentry outcomes. Several states have implemented imaginative pilot programs to plan early for reentry and provide comprehensive services upon release. Interest in reentry is high among corrections and law enforcement leaders. Missouri Department of Corrections Director Gary B. Kempker, a former Missouri Police Chief of the Year who chairs the Community Policing Committee of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, says, “Polls show that more and more people believe that Re-Entry policy should be focused on preventing recidivism and helping offenders reintegrate....” Kempker concludes, “We need: better pre-release programs; better release and revocation decision-making; better community partnerships; review of legal and practical barriers; review of supervision

strategies; reinvestment in work-education and substance abuse programming; (and) better communication with other disciplines.... The future is bleak without change.”

Please act now to pass comprehensive reentry legislation to address this urgent public safety issue that many law enforcement professionals identify as community problem-solving linked with crime control. Such legislation should assist governments, community organizations and faith-based groups to improve offender accountability, case management and treatment by comprehensive methods likely to reduce recidivism. The legislation should:

Provide meaningful support to the states to help them address the reentry crisis.

Provide federal support to the states in a way that encourages and supports increased reentry coordination among state agencies and non-governmental service providers and also provides substantial program assistance to non-governmental service providers, including faith-based providers.

Address the urgent need for housing, employment, substance abuse treatment, and mental health services for reentering offenders.

Provide assistance to reunite and heal families unless it would be inappropriate to do so because of past behavior.

End unreasonable and counter-productive barriers to successful and safe reentry.

President Bush concluded his remarks on reentry in the State of the Union address by pointing out, **“America is the land of the second chance, and when the gates of prison open, the path ahead should lead to a better life.”** Time is short for congressional action this year. Prompt action by Congress can significantly increase public safety and help make a better life for us all.

Please let us know if we can provide you with additional information on reentry. You may contact representatives of any of the organizations listed below including: Pat Nolan, Justice Fellowship, 703-904-7312; Ron Field, Volunteers of America, 703-341-5044; Joey Weedon, American Correctional Association, 301-918-1885; Jenny Collier, Legal Action Center, 202-544-5478 x13; Jim Lanier, National Urban League, 202-898-1604; Steve Berg, National Alliance to End Homelessness, 202-638-1526 x102; Mary Shilton, National TASC, 703-836-8272; or Malika Saada Saar, Rebecca Project for Human Rights, 202-265-3907.

Thank you for your leadership on this critically important issue.

National Organizations

American Correctional Association
Prison Fellowship
Volunteers of America
National Network for Youth
Presbyterian Church (USA), Washington
Office
National Urban League
Legal Action Center
Justice Fellowship
Evangelical Lutheran Church in
America

National TASC (Treatment
Accountability for Safer
Communities)
American Probation and Parole Association
National Association of Blacks in
Criminal Justice
American Association for Correctional
Psychology
The Sentencing Project
Justice Policy Institute
Union for Reform Judaism

National Alliance to End
Homelessness
Unitarian Universalist Association of
Congregations
National Council of La Raza
Therapeutic Communities of America
National Transitional Jobs Network
Leadership Conference on Civil Rights
National Coalition for Homeless
Veterans
United Church of Christ
National Religious Affairs Association
State Associations of Addiction Services
National Association of Drug Court
Professionals
American Society of Addiction Medicine
American Association for the Treatment of
Opioid Dependence
American Correctional Chaplains
Association
International Community Corrections
Association
National Low Income Housing Coalition
State Associations of Addiction Services
National Council on Alcoholism and
Drug Dependence

National Employment Law Project
Justice Policy Institute
National H.I.R.E. Network
Criminon International
National Law Center on
Homelessness & Poverty
National Correctional Industries Association
Church of Scientology
National AIDS Housing Coalition
Mennonite Central Committee US,
Washington Office
The Rebecca Project for Human
Rights
Child Welfare League of America

State and Local Organizations

Ohio Correctional and Court Services Association	Offender Aid & Restoration (OAR) of Richmond, Inc.
Office for Social Justice, Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis	Stepping Stones to Success, New York, NY
Key Education, Inc., Manalapan, NJ	STEPS to End Family Violence, New York, NY
For Women Only, Inc., Los Angeles, CA	Making Career Connections, Albany, NY
D.C. Prisoners' Legal Services Project, Washington, DC	California Association of Alcohol and Drug Programs Executives
G.R.A.P.E. Gang Reduction, Awareness, Prevention & Education, Sierra Vista, AZ	Connecticut Association of Nonprofits
Employment Program for Recovered Alcoholics, New York, NY	Connecticut Association of Substance Abuse Agencies
TurnAround Village, LTD, Covington, LA	Connecticut Council of Family Service Agencies
PRAISSE Project	North Carolina Association For Behavioral Health Care
Pacific Mountain Workforce Offender Programs, Lacey, WA	The Ohio Council of Behavioral Health Care
Maryland Criminal Justice Association	The Maine Association of Substance Abuse Programs
Justice Works!, Seattle, WA	The Maine Alliance for Addiction Recovery
Family Justice, New York, NY	Iowa Substance Abuse Program Directors' Association
Richmond Workforce Investment Board	Illinois Alcoholism and Drug Dependence Association
UrbaneKnight Inc., Toledo, OH	The Michigan Association of Licensed Substance Abuse Organizations
Philadelphia Workforce Development Corporation, Philadelphia, PA	Lyon Council On Alcohol and Other Drugs of Rural Nevada
Roseborough & Associates, Chicago, IL	Tarzana Treatment Centers, Tarzana, CA
Center for Community Alternatives, Syracuse and New York, NY	Nevada Alliance of Addictive Disorders
Jubilee Jobs, Washington, DC	Advocacy for Prevention and Treatment Services
Connections To Success, St. Louis and Kansas City, MO	Nevada Department of Corrections
All of Us or None, Oklahoma City Chapter	Vermont Association of Drug and Alcohol Programs
TASC, Inc. of Illinois	Surviving the System, Inc., Ridgeland, MS
Meta House, Milwaukee, Wisconsin	
Arizona Council of Human Service Providers	
Iowa Corrections Association	
Transitional Living Centers	
Florida Alcohol and Drug Abuse Association	
Civic Association Serving Harlem	
T.H.U.G.S. Ministries (Taking Highways Under God's Supervision)	
Key Education, Inc., Tinton Falls, NJ	
Incarcerated Mothers Program, New York, NY	
Alston Wilkes Society, Columbia, SC	

