

Constructing a State-Wide Reentry Network:

A Solution to Recidivism and A Way to Dismantle the Cradle to Jail Pipeline

Through the efforts of CLEAR and the Criminal Justice Task Force (CJTF), Massachusetts is the first state to adopt an expansive state-wide, state-funded re-entry program. Prior to adopting the re-entry program, Massachusetts had a constellation of privately funded reentry organizations which were specialized and uncoordinated. Each varied in scope, efficacy, and focus. In 2019, Professor Deborah Ramirez, on behalf of CJTF and other advocacy groups, lobbied the Massachusetts Legislature for a legislative mandate to reallocate state funds towards re-entry resources. The effective solution was to create a re-entry network through an existing agency—the Office of Community Corrections (OCC). The OCC is Massachusetts Probation Service’s intermediate sanctions department, and provides services for probation, parole, sheriffs, and the Department of Correction, and has 19 offices throughout the state. With the legislative mandate, existing state funds were reallocated towards re-entry support. Codified in Chapter 122 of the Acts of 2022, the General Appropriations Act, the Ralph Gants Reentry Services Program was created at Community Justice Support Centers (under the Office of Community Corrections or OCC). As an OCC initiative, the Community Justice Support Centers (CJSCs) were created to provide one-stop shopping for both people coming out of prison and for community partners and employers seeking to connect with and provide resources for those individuals reentering. Now, every person returning to the community has a place to go for help in obtaining a State photo ID, housing, education, vocational training, employment, health insurance, substance use disorder treatment, mental health treatment, counseling, and other

essential reentry resources. The Community Justice Support Centers utilizes the existing 19 offices and a budget of 30 million dollars to help provide these resources. However, the work does not stop there.

The Criminal Justice Task Force is an academic partner to the CJSCs and conducts research on re-entry practices that will inform best practices for the CJSCs to be “one-stop shops”. Currently, Professor Ramirez and her team have written a paper that provides a re-entry proposal for Massachusetts and other states to adopt as guidance for successful re-entry practices and as a method to mitigate recidivism. The lack of investment in re-entry efforts is directly correlated to the revolving door of recidivism. The proposal explains why addressing recidivism is vital to reducing economic spending, increasing public safety, dismantling the cradle-to-jail pipeline, and achieving social justice. Additionally, it highlights discussions with stakeholders from every angle, analyzes re-entry initiatives from other states to identify areas of concern, and proposes solutions to these problems by creating an infrastructure to address recidivism on a systemic level.

Massachusetts hopes to serve as a model for other states by establishing a strategic framework, outlining who needs to be involved, where funding should be allocated, and how to efficiently build a state-wide network. The paper lays out the plan to create a state-wide program for every individual re-entering society from jail or prison by proposing the following six prongs:

- (1) A state-wide network that funds education, employment training, and other resources beginning inside prison or jail;
- (2) Community-based support through mentors and navigators;
- (3) Access to resources that promote staying on track;
- (4) Engaging formerly incarcerated individuals to enhance effectiveness of re-entry networks;
- (5) Passing legislation that requires reentry planning to begin during incarceration, and ensures that each person upon release walks

out with an ID, training/potential for employment, housing, and access to mental health and substance use disorder treatment; and (6) Building a jail to job pipeline through community partnerships, in order to disrupt the cycle of recidivism and provide stable employment for individuals upon their release from jail or prison.

As part of the steps to implement this proposal, CJTF has been working on educating and recruiting community stakeholders to participate in the re-entry network and in re-entry reform. As the re-entry program gets on its feet, CJTF continues to lobby the legislature for additional funding. This year, working with the CJSC's, the CJTF assisted with a proposal that resulted in a \$900,000 grant from the Bureau of Justice to begin building the jail to jobs pipeline. CJTF's reentry subcommittee has partnered with legal professionals, including Justice Sydney Hanlon and Judge Rosalind Miller, to offer ongoing training programs to judges and attorneys that spotlight the voices of formerly incarcerated individuals and provide guidance on how to implement rehabilitative re-entry practices as soon as a person enters the criminal justice system. The reentry subcommittee has created a video training resource to be made available to community stakeholders, and hosted an online webinar through the FlaschnerJudicial Institute, which included Justice Serge Georges, Jr. of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court as a speaker.

Employment resources for incarcerated and release individuals is another important area of re-entry need. Employment is a key re-entry point, as individuals who are able to acquire and retain a job are less likely to recidivate, and more likely to contribute positively to their community. CJTF has created a project titled "The Jail to Jobs Pipeline" whose goal is to connect tech, trade, hospital and corporate and biotech industries in need of employees to the incarcerated individuals searching for employment upon release. The project seeks to identify gaps in the

labor force within industries , and remedy those gaps through partnership with businesses who are amenable to hiring and training individuals upon their release.

This paper envisions a state-wide/state-funded reentry network whose goal is to provide comprehensive, consistent, coordinated, and stable reentry resources to every person coming out of prison or jail. Every state's economic development plan should include a re-entry network that ensures all people coming out of jail and prison have the resources they need to create a productive life. Everyone wants safety, security, and stability. Instead of continuing to allow vulnerable people to struggle through multiple disadvantages under the current system, it makes sense to create effective, rehabilitative re-entry programming that promotes a more stable society.