



POSITION PAPER No. 3/213th Legislature (2008-09)

ISSUE:

Establishes Prisoner Reentry Commission in the Department of Corrections

BILL NO.

A-2023 (/Watson-Coleman)

S-1348 (Turner)

NCADD-NJ POSITION:

NCADD-New Jersey supports this bill, but believes two amendments are needed to ensure that the commission most effectively addresses the services needed and the correlation between reentry, recidivism and substance use disorders. The amendments NCADD-NJ recommends are as follows:

Page 2 line 13 insert “substance use disorders” so it reads:

Whereas, there is a need to explore, develop and expand community-based health care and treatment resources for returning prisoners, as former prisoners have a high rate of physical, substance use disorders, and mental health issues.

Page 3 line 32 (section 15) insert “and one who shall have experience working with substance use disorders” So it reads:

Two public members, who by experience or training have expertise in issues facing former prisoners, at least one of whom shall have experience working with a faith-based community organization, and one who shall have experience working with substance use disorders, to be appointed by the governor.

The substance use history and behaviors of a re-

leased prisoner can have important implications for his or her reentry experience, posing an additional hurdle to the already significant challenge of staying crime free. The link between substance use and criminal activity has been well documented. Approximately 80 percent of prisoners have extensive substance use histories. Many violated drug or alcohol laws, were under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol at the time they committed their crimes, stole property to buy drugs, have a history of substance use disorders, or share some combination of these characteristics. The Bureau of Justice Statistics survey reported that 52 percent of female prisoners and 44 percent of male prisoners met the criteria for alcohol or drug dependence upon incarceration. In New Jersey, 32 percent of prisoners are incarcerated due to a base offense involving drugs.

A large proportion of released prisoners are at risk of reoffending due to both drug-induced behavior and the commission of economically motivated crimes linked to their drug use. Substance use problems not only increase the chance of reoffending, but they also hinder the returning prisoner’s ability to complete job requirements and reestablish relations with family.

Prisoners identify drug use as the primary cause of their past and current problem: 60 percent cited substance use as the cause of one or more family, relationship, employment, legal or financial problems.

Despite high levels of substance use disorders, relatively few prisoners receive drug treatment while incarcerated and thus will need it upon release. In 2002, although 81 percent of New Jersey inmates had some type of drug or alcohol abuse problem, program capacity was limited to 6 percent of the prison population. In addition, corrections and treatment researchers and practitioners agree that in-prison treatment is much more likely to effectively sustain a decline in substance use if it is linked to



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drug treatment aftercare in the community.

Those with substance use histories and those who engage in substance use after release are at a high risk of re-arrest. As an example, 81% of inmates with five or more prior convictions used drugs regularly. A five-year study by researchers at the Center for Drug and Alcohol Studies at the University of Delaware found that prisoners who participated in a residential treatment program during a work-release program were significantly more likely to avoid drug use and to avoid being re-arrested within five years of release, as compared to a similar group on work release that received no substance abuse treatment.

In New Jersey, the different recidivism rates between people released from prison and drug court clients who engage in treatment is very telling. Of those released from prison, within three years 51 percent were rearrested, 40 percent were reconvicted, and 34 percent were reincarcerated. In contrast, within three years of Drug Court graduation, only 15 percent of New Jersey's Drug Court graduates were re-arrested, only 6 percent were reconvicted, and only 3 percent were reincarcerated. In addition, 90 percent were employed at the time of graduation.

Scientific research shows that addiction treatment helps many drug abusing offenders change their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors towards drug abuse, avoid relapse, and successfully remove themselves from a life of substance abuse and crime. Studies show that treatment can cut drug use in half, reduce criminal activity up to 80 percent, and reduce arrests up to 64 percent. By addressing the substance use disorders of inmates returning home, society saves billions of dollars in reduced crime and reduced recidivism and reclaims thousands of individuals to live as responsible parents, employees, taxpayers and law-abiding citizens.

This is not an easy task. The gap between available

substance abuse treatment and the need for such treatment is enormous. In New Jersey, 1 in 2 adults who seek treatment and 2 in 3 adolescents who seek treatment are unable to access it due to limited capacity. In reviewing, studying and offering solutions for problems facing prisoners who are reentering society, it is critical that the commission address the insufficient addiction treatment available and include the expertise of someone with experience with substance use disorders.

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