

The Louisiana Prisoner ReEntry Initiative (LA-PRI)

SUMMARY

THE PROBLEM: Louisiana has the highest per capita incarceration rate in the nation with 816 per 100,000 compared to 471 nationally. One in 26 adults is under correctional control, compared to 1 in 31 nationally.¹ Louisiana's incarceration rate has increased 272% since 1982 and currently has over 36,000 state prisoners. Nearly half of those incarcerated are serving their sentences in local parish jails for which the state is paying over \$172 million per year to house. There are 105 jail facilities in the state's 64 parishes with a total rated capacity of 45,813 beds and nearly 40% of these local beds are filled with state prisoners. The 5 year recidivism rate for offenders discharging from parish jails is 44%, as compared with the 5 year rate of 42% for all releases. Currently a gap exists between preparation for release among state offenders housed in state prisons and those confined in parish jail facilities: No systematic assessment of criminogenic risk and needs is now done at the local jail level – a fact that affects the recidivism of half of all Louisiana state prisoners. And in the state's urban centers, reentry is more difficult: the state's largest 12 parishes have a 56% recidivism rate.²

GOALS/OBJECTIVES: The goal of the Louisiana Prisoner ReEntry Initiative (LA-PRI) is to cut the recidivism rate by 50% for higher risk returning prisoners, beginning with the parishes that contribute the highest number of prisoners to the system. Objectives: (1) Provide a collaborative process to gain support with state's justice leaders, business leaders, local and state government officials, community human service providers, justice and victim advocates, families of the incarcerated, and law enforcement; (2) Provide process and experimental research evaluations to show impact; (3) Work with communities to demonstrate reduced recidivism through improved case planning and case management, built on actuarial risk/need assessment, good data, enhanced human service delivery³ and, comprehensive planning; (4) Create transitional and permanent jobs by working with Louisiana's business community⁴; (5) Build affordable housing opportunities⁵, linked to employment⁶; (6) Create/adapt DPSC policy procedure in order to ensure sustainability.

STRATEGY: Recidivism reduction strategies in Louisiana are driven by the risk and needs of prisoners. Of the 64 parishes in Louisiana, 12 parishes account for 67% of the incarcerated population and 62% of the returning population. The statewide 5 year recidivism rate is 42% while the top 12 parishes have a 56% rate. The five largest urban parishes (Orleans, Jefferson, East Baton Rouge, Caddo and St. Tammany) account for 40% of the returning population. By targeting these 12 parishes, especially the top 5, the statewide rate will drop⁷. To accomplish this, returning prisoners need supervision and services to manage and reduce their risk and address their needs – especially for sustainable employment, affordable housing and substance abuse.⁸ The LA-PRI is the framework for prisoner reentry the state. Under the LA-PRI, the Department of Public Safety and Corrections (DPSC) envisions every prisoner returning to their community with the tools and resources needed for success. These tools and resources will be provided through the revised ReEntry Accountability Plan (ReAP) risk/need assessment case management system.

SIGNIFICANT PARTNERSHIPS: The LA-PRI is a partnership between DPSC, the Board of Parole, the Workforce Commission, the Sheriff's Association, the Louisiana Association of Nonprofit Organizations, Center for Justice Innovation⁹, Louisiana State University, the business community, the philanthropic community, and parishes throughout the state which have formed ReEntry Coalitions and local reentry implementation teams that focus on improved case planning and management.

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES: The LA-PRI will show that expanded pre/post release reentry services under the improved case planning and management framework of the ReAP can cut the return to prison recidivism rate for targeted offenders. For every 10% reduction in recidivism in the state's 12 largest parishes, the state will save over \$3 million. A 50% rate reduction will save over \$15 million. The amount of investment required to achieve these savings will be determined in each community as the need for specific additional services is assessed. It has been proven in other states that prisoner reentry creates better citizens, safer communities and fewer victims of crime while saving taxpayer's dollars so they can be used for more productive endeavors.¹⁰

ENDNOTES/CITATIONS

¹ Pew Center on the States (2009).

² Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections (2016).

³ Frazier, B. D. (2008) found that outreach to ex-offenders and networking between and among social and supportive services providers was essential in increasing the number of ex-offenders who are provided much-needed services. Awareness of social and supportive services networks in neighborhoods is key to improving the process of outreach and networking for community organizations and dramatically improving reentry outcomes.

⁴ The Louisiana business community has developed a forum to support criminal justice reform. *Louisiana Smart on Crime* has developed a fundamental position on criminal justice which supports statutory and policy changes that will improve the outcomes of former prisoners: "Instead of creating economic obstacles, Louisiana could ensure that employers are able to safely and securely hire those with a criminal record. The state could also ensure that those who have earned a second chance are able to obtain housing and achieve gainful employment. This makes good economic sense but would also make our state demonstrably safer. Employment has been linked with lower recidivism rates, meaning these policies could both boost employment and cut crime. This policy agenda will strengthen Louisiana's economy, lift up its citizens, and restore our communities."

⁵ The absence of affordable and sustainable housing is linked with increased recidivism. See for example, Metraux and Culhane (2004), Nelson, Deess and Allen (1999).

⁶ Gainful employment is linked with reduced recidivism. See for example, Uggen and Staff (2004), Krienert and Fleisher (2004), Bushway and Reuter (2000)

⁷ Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections (2015)

⁸ Lattimore & Visser, (2009) found that the complexity of the disadvantages confronting prisoners after release means that individual offenders often require more than a single program or intervention. The most helpful approach is to look for a solution that encourages a broader focus on comprehensive reentry strategies instead of specific programs. These strategies include involving multiple levels of government, coordinating efforts across agencies, and involving organizations that were not originally part of the reentry discussion (such as public health and local businesses). Implementing these strategies and involving these agencies will likely improve prisoner reintegration in employment, substance abuse, and health, and may also reduce recidivism.

⁹ The Center for Justice Innovation is led by Dennis Schrantz who has worked for the past 15 years to assist state and local jurisdictions in improving their policies and practices for prisoner reentry. His work in Michigan from 2002-2008 focused on integrated research into the policies and practices that reduce recidivism and has been highlighted in numerous publications⁹ and has established his reputation as a leading national expert on how to reduce the return-to-prison recidivism rate of former prisoners, reduce prison populations, and reinvest prison dollars into communities. See, for example: *Downscaling Prisons; Lessons from Four States* (The Sentencing Project, 2010), *On the Chopping Block: State Prison Closings* (The Sentencing Project, 2012); *Michigan Breaks the Political Logjam: A New Model for Reducing Prison Populations* (The ACLU, 2009); *Prison Break: How Michigan Managed to Empty its Penitentiaries while Lowering its Crime Rate* (Washington Monthly Magazine; Nov./Dec. 2010); *States Report Reductions in Recidivism* (Council of State Governments' Justice Center, Sept. 2012)

¹⁰ Due to the Michigan Prisoner Reentry Initiative (MPRI), Michigan witnessed the largest drop in recidivism of former prisoners in the United States with an overall 18% reduction in returns to prison between 2005 and 2007 – and a 28% reduction from 2000 to 2008 (Council of State Governments, Justice Center, *States Report Reductions in Recidivism*, 2012). As a result of this and other factors such as reduced prison commitments under the Michigan Community Corrections Act, Michigan's prison population declined 12% in just three years and a 17% drop over five years (Michigan Department of Corrections' Report to the Legislature, *Prison Population Projection Report*, Feb. 2014)—without an increase in the crime rate (Michigan Crime Rates 1960-2014, the Disaster Center) and contributed to the closing of 21 prison facilities (The Sentencing Project, *On the Chopping Block: State Prison Closings*, August 2011). For cohorts of targeted MPRI parolees through 2011, the reduction in recidivism was 38% (Michigan Department of Corrections, *Michigan Prisoner Reentry: A Success Story*, 2013) Since the efforts to control and reduce the prison population began in 2002, it is estimated that cost avoidance for prison operations is nearly \$1 billion (2016 Resolution, Michigan Collaborative to End Mass Incarceration, <http://www.michigancollaborative.org/>).