



Second Chance Campaign of New Jersey Brings State-wide Stake Holders Together in Forum at Rutgers School of Criminal Justice

With attendees coming from across the state, the **Second Chance Campaign of New Jersey** held a public launch event on June 19, 2008, at the Rutgers School of Criminal Justice in Newark.

Filling the school's atrium to overflowing, the Campaign inaugurated a new level of outreach with a half-day forum that included keynotes from political officials and leading advocates in the field, a panel of experts sharing their experiences on the front line assisting former prisoners, and working-group breakout sessions where opinions and ideas flowed freely and passionately.



A full house gathered in the Atrium of the Rutgers School of Criminal Justice for the Second Chance Campaign of New Jersey.

This report summarizes the event, which helped set the stage for future state-wide advocacy on behalf of the thousands of New Jersey citizens who are today incarcerated – most of whom will one day be released – and those who have already come home to their communities.

The Second Chance Campaign Defined

The Second Chance Campaign is a growing state-wide movement of advocacy organizations, service providers, policymakers, faith-based organizations,

business people, government and community leaders, and interested citizens committed to achieving the safe and successful reintegration of adults and juveniles returning home from incarceration by promoting policies that remove barriers to productive citizenship.

Statistics point to a compelling need for this effort:

- ◆ In the last 30 years, the New Jersey prison population more than quadrupled, increasing from about 6,000 to more than 27,000. More than 95% of this population will one day be released.
- ◆ More than 14,000 prisoners are released each year from state prisons back to their communities, with an additional 1,600 being released from juvenile detention centers annually. Many more transition in and out of county jails on short sentences.
- ◆ A complex set of legal barriers and policy decisions prevent easy return to a productive life for those released from prison or jail at completion of their sentence. These barriers and policies are major contributors to the high rate of recidivism, estimated to be in the 65% range. This rate greatly affects the public costs for the state's system of incarceration and post-release supervision, which today exceeds \$1 billion per year.

In welcoming the audience to the event, **Cornell Brooks, Executive Director of the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice**, pointed to these facts and quoted the great civil rights leader Frederick Douglas, who said: "There can be no progress without struggle." He then added: "The Second Chance Campaign was founded upon the conviction that formerly incarcerated men and women, their families, concerned citizens, activist in the neighborhoods, researchers in the academy, clergy irrespective of creed, business people irrespective of market, and ordinary citizens have the power to struggle for

reasonable, cost-effective and humane prisoner reentry reforms.”

Keynote Jeremy Travis Frames the Issues

Keynote for the conference was provided by **Jeremy Travis, President of John Jay College of Criminal Justice at the City University of New York**. Mr. Travis is a renowned author on re-entry issues. Over his long career, Travis has served in government at every level and worked in the private and nonprofit sectors where he has been a leading voice on the issues of constitutional law, criminal law and criminal justice policy.

“My role today,” he said, “is to help us think seriously about why this issue is so urgent and why working on solutions is so hard.”

Travis suggested that looking backward over the past twenty-five years, “it is as if we have engaged in a grand social experiment to see what would happen if we quadrupled our incarceration rate in America.” He noted that the per capita rate of incarceration in 1972 was about 110 per 100,000; today it is more than four times that rate. And, Travis stated, the rate increase appears to have taken on a high degree of independence from outside influence, rising as much in bad economic times as good and when crime rates have been falling as well as when they have risen.

“We are in what some have called ‘the era of mass incarceration,’” he said. Coupled with increased incarceration, Travis pointed to two other trends that have added to today’s re-entry conundrum. First there are stricter processes for parole, with more enforcement, greater surveillance and less discretion for penalties, including return to prison, if a parolee slips up, even with minor or merely technical infractions. The result, he noted, is that today some 200,000 people across the country are sent back to prison for violating parole when in 1980 that was the total number sent to prison for any reason.

A second trend is the network of what Travis called “invisible punishments.” These are the growing number of sanctions ordered by legislative action and removed from judicial discretion. “Increasingly,” he

said, “these legislatively defined sanctions have a significant negative effect on the process of re-integration back to the community after prison.” Included in this list, and familiar in New Jersey, are such policy decisions affecting former prisoners as denying a driver’s licenses; prohibitions on securing other job-related licenses, such as to become a barber; public housing bans, which work against reintegration with families; withholding access to food stamps and other government support; and more.



Jeremy Travis, President of John Jay College of Criminal Justice, provides keynote to the Second Chance Campaign convocation.

Having laid out what he termed “some pretty depressing stuff,” Travis indicated reasons to be optimistic about change. “The re-entry movement to me is very vibrant,” he said. “It is bringing a lot of people to the table and puts a very human face on issues of incarceration.”

He pointed to the Federal Second Chance Act, signed by President Bush in April, 2008, after nearly unanimous consent in Congress, as evidence of bipartisan support for change. And he challenged the audience to think of the Second Chance Campaign as “a big conversation” that brings many constituencies with related concerns to the table besides those most closely associated with criminal justice issues. These other constituencies include those working in areas such as:

- ◆ *Workforce development*, especially in urban areas where a large percentage of the population have criminal justice records and where jobs are a major issue;

- ◆ *Child and family welfare*, whose stake was made clear from the statistic he cited that 10% of all minor children in America today have a parent who is in prison, on parole or on probation;
- ◆ *Public health*, given that the prison population – and therefore the re-entering population – has much higher rates than the general public for such diseases as TB, hepatitis, HIV and AIDS;
- ◆ *Racial justice*, with the over-representation of African Americans in prison creating common cause with civil rights organization;
- ◆ *Fiscal solvency*, with business people, chambers of commerce and others who think about how to create economic viability in the state struggling against budget constraints on issues from education to infrastructure, as well as the criminal justice system.

“I am an optimist,” Travis concluded. “I’m optimistic because in the re-entry movement I think we have many allies who care about the issue for their own reasons, but can come together in common cause. We may find these allies in unexpected quarters, but we are much, much stronger when we stand together.”

Newark Mayor Cory Booker Brings the Case Home

Speaking next, the **Honorable Cory Booker, Mayor of Newark**, brought his own sense of urgency to the issue. “The volume of people who are going to prison in no way reflects who we are – or should be – as a city, a state or a nation,” Booker said. “We seem to be creating a culture of criminality where even those who are well-intentioned, who have slipped and fallen and made mistakes but are ready to get back on track, find themselves trapped without options and with such limited hope that they fall back into life styles that caused so many of their challenges in the first place.”

With Newark at the heart of the re-entry issue in New Jersey (about 11% of those released from New Jersey’s prisons annually come “back home” to Newark’s neighborhoods, highest for any municipality in the state), Booker pointed to progress in the city, with policy changes being made and new resources

coming on line to support the re-integration of the formerly incarcerated.

“We are in the foothills as a city,” he said, “and I’m very sober about the mountain we still have to climb as we couple our commitment to that of so many nonprofit and community groups.” He pointed to such actions as reprogramming dollars to help create jobs in city agencies, creating Youth Education and Employment Centers, and supporting a pro-bono legal services organization that focuses just on ex-offenders and their challenges.



The Honorable Cory Booker, Mayor of Newark, talks about his city’s efforts to help formerly incarcerated citizens “come home” to their communities.

He closed with a ringing endorsement of the Second Chance Campaign’s effort. “I am grateful to be in the trenches, in the grass roots, with all of you here in this room who have heard the call to action, the call of democracy, and are willing to do substantive things to make a real difference.”

Panel of Experts Provides Insights from the Front Lines

The next meeting session brought to the fore a panel representing a wide variety of views and expertise in dealing with re-entry issues, from service providers to academics, from employers to those with personal stories of returning home from prison.

The panel was moderated by **Lawrence Aarons, columnist for *The Record* newspaper**, which is the second largest newspaper in New Jersey. Aarons has written extensively on what he termed “the unintended consequences of incarceration and prison policy.”

The panel included:

- ◆ **Jim Hemm**, Executive Director, New Jersey Association on Correction, Trenton;
- ◆ **Debra Henderson**, Community Outreach Coordinator, Women Who Never Give Up, Magnolia;
- ◆ **Allen James**, Director, New Jersey Institute for Social Justice New Careers Project, Newark;
- ◆ **Glenn Martin**, Associate Vice President for Advocacy and Policy, The Fortune Society, New York City
- ◆ **Don Shauger**, Executive Vice President, the Shauger Group, Newark
- ◆ **Kaia Stern**, Director, Pathways Home Project at the Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Racial Justice at Harvard Law School, Cambridge;
- ◆ **Kimble Wilson**, formerly incarcerated citizen.

Questions and responses covered a wide range of issues. Regarding obstacles for successful re-integration, **Allen James** listed a daunting set of “concrete barriers” people in his program deal with, including difficulty obtaining driver’s licenses and covering the costs of old traffic violations not vacated before incarceration, lack of even basic identification documents upon release, difficulty with child support



Panel of experts provides testimony from the front line of the Second Chance Campaign. From left, moderator Aarons and panelists Hemm, Henderson, Allen, Martin, Shauger, Stern and Wilson

debt, state laws barring people from working in growing areas of employment, and more.

Debra Henderson spoke movingly of her difficult experience when her husband “came home from prison.” Communication within the family was particularly tough, she said, as he tried to reconnect with their children, ages 13 and six. “If we had counseling and parenting skills assistance, it would have been a tremendous help,” she said. “We have to remember that reintegrating isn’t just an event for the person coming home, it is a family event.” This was echoed by **Kimble Wilson**, who was recently released from prison after a 14-year sentence. “I’ve been home a little more than a year,” he said. “I wanted to re-start my life. I used my time inside to reflect, to become a better person. And I’m working hard, despite lots of obstacles to do the right thing to sustain myself.”

Don Shauger spoke of how his firm tries to help people coming out of prison be successful employees. President of a large building maintenance and servicing firm, which he started with his wife in their basement 20 years ago, Shauger is committed to hiring former prisoners, offering up to 20% of the jobs on some service contracts to formerly incarcerated individuals. “These are good workers,” he said, “and we find it is good business to support them by, for example, advancing funds for them to pay old fines so they can get a driver’s licenses, not using former incarceration as an automatic screen against hiring as some do, and providing strong training opportunities.”

Responding to a question about whether some people might view services for ex-offenders in some way as “rewarding criminals,” **Glenn Martin** spoke passionately that “no-one complains when we spend billions of dollars on prisons, but they don’t realize the connection between support services and reducing these costs.” Telling his own history, he added: “I’m sitting here because while I was in prison I was given access to a \$12,000 two-year college degree. I used to do robberies for a living. And it seems to me [the State of New York] got more bang for their buck by providing me with that \$12,000 degree than the \$140,000 it spent to keep me in prison for six years!”

Raising the issue to national proportions, **Kaia Stern** called the current situation a “crisis of mass

incarceration, with financial costs of over \$60 billion a year.” But from this crisis, she sees opportunity “... if we can galvanize to increase investment for parole reform, education and alternatives to incarceration.”

Jim Hemm added to this by citing New Jersey’s new system of Drug Courts, which provides alternatives to incarceration for some non-violent admitted drug offenders that includes treatment, counseling and other services. “To the extent we are able to keep people from going to prison or out of detention; [drug courts] are a great thing,” Hemm said. “But success depends heavily on providing sufficient structure and funding for the wrap-around collateral services in education, health monitoring, social services, etc.”

Working Groups Dive into Issues

The final segment of the morning provided attendees with an opportunity to participate in one of three small-group discussions on specific areas of concern for the Second Chance Campaign. Reports to the whole meeting summarized where future action needs to be directed.

1. Public Awareness and Messaging

Session moderator **Chris Rosica, President, Rosica Strategic Public Relations**, noted that necessary policy changes will happen only through broad support among various publics and audiences, which need to be brought “up the chain” from awareness to understanding to action. The working group looked at what message platforms might have relevance for the campaign, highlighting the need to gain support for change by emphasizing how addressing re-integration issues could positively impact public safety, fiscal responsibility and the state budget, and bring about social benefit by providing large numbers of people the chance to make positive contributions to their communities.

2. “Inside” Issues

This working group addressed how to build an “accountability structure” so that re-entry for those incarcerated in prison begins at intake. Moderators **Ed Martone, of the New Jersey Association on Corrections**, and **Jean Ross of Peoples Organization for Progress** reported that their group’s discussion highlighted issues of family re-unification. A

particular example of state policy working against families is the surcharge placed by the state on collect calls made by prisoners to their families back home. “This is a very clear tip of the iceberg,” Martone said. “The long distance for many to visit their family members in prison makes it difficult or economically impossible for people to stay in touch – even by telephone – and the surcharge makes it less likely there will be a successful return to the family, and more likely there will be continuing burden of recidivism.” The group also addressed the need for building a broad “advocacy coalition” for policy change, which – in addition to other constituencies – should also include those most directly affected – prisoners and their families. For Jean Ross, this means “... thinking about creative ways to frame our issues so we interest people who may at first instinct think this doesn’t pertain to them.”

3. “Outside” Issues

Omar Shabazz, of the American Friends Service Committee and Pat McKernan, from Volunteers of America lead discussions on how to eliminate barriers to successful re-entry which often create “collateral sanctions” that prevent personal and family stabilization of the formerly incarcerated. One of the most pressing issues is so-called “ban-the-box” policy changes, which aim to remove the box on job applications asking if an applicant has ever been convicted. “Too often employers use this box to



Audience members give attention to working group reports on messaging, and issues affecting people both inside prison and when they are released.

immediately screen out well-qualified individuals,”

McKernan stated. Recognizing that back-ground and security screening by employers is often a requirement before hiring, the ban-the-box effort hopes to at least allow a “foot in the door” for those who have completed their sentence. Other areas for action include the range of job-license bans, bans against housing, and federal rules against felons – particularly those convicted of drug crimes – from accessing public support such as food stamps and Medicaid. As Shabazz noted, “We have to remember that these programs are meant to be a safety net for the vulnerable, and people coming out of prison are among the most vulnerable members of society.”

Next Steps in the Campaign

In closing the first-ever New Jersey Second Chance Campaign convocation, **Rick Greenberg, Director of the Second Chance Campaign Coalition**, thanked the audience for their attendance, and encouraged their continued involvement.

“While we approach re-entry issues from a diversity of perspectives,” he said, “we work together through the Campaign to strive for change in a unified voice. We are devoted to changing laws – to changing the ‘rules of the game’ – and we are also devoted to changing hearts and minds, through public education and public awareness to remove stigma and de-bunk stereotypes.

“To accomplish these shared benefits – realizing that we share a collective stake in success – the Campaign is a call to all of us to come together to contribute and do our parts, for we all have important roles to play: we advocates, we service providers, we faith leaders, we government and law enforcement officials, we private philanthropists, we business owners, and we formerly incarcerated individuals and loved ones.

“So, today,” Greenberg concluded, “we call you to action and invite you to join us: Sign on to the Second Chance Campaign, lend your name and your energy, and the Campaign will be your voice for advocacy and your vehicle for change.”

The Following Organizations are Signatories of the Second Chance Campaign

American Friends Service Committee ♦ Association for Children of New Jersey ♦ Charles Hamilton Houston Institute
♦ Coalition of Community Corrections Providers of New Jersey ♦ Drug Policy Alliance of New Jersey ♦ Families
Against Mandatory Minimums ♦ Fund for New Jersey ♦ Goodwill Industries ♦ Greater Essex County Reentry Providers
Network ♦ Hispanic Directors Association of New Jersey ♦ Housing and Community Development Network of New
Jersey ♦ Hyacinth AIDS Foundation ♦ Integrity House ♦ Jubilee Interfaith ♦ Latino Leadership Alliance of New Jersey
♦ Leadership New Jersey, Class of 2007 ♦ Legal Action Center ♦ Legal Services of New Jersey ♦ NAACP ♦ National
Alliance on Mental Illness ♦ National Employment Law Project ♦ National H.I.R.E. Network ♦ New Jersey Association
on Correction ♦ New Jersey Black Issues Convention ♦ New Jersey Citizen Action ♦ New Jersey Institute for Social
Justice ♦ New Jersey Latino Peace Officers Association ♦ New Jersey Policy Perspective ♦ Newark Reentry Legal
Services (ReLeSe) Network ♦ People's Organization for Progress ♦ Pilgrimage Outreach/Leadership ♦ Police Institute
♦ Rutgers Newark, School of Criminal Justice ♦ Thomas Edison State College ♦ Volunteers of America ♦ Women Who
Never Give-up

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