



Major Appreciation Event Held at Lowenstein Sandler to Recognize Passage of Three Reentry Bills

The Alan V. Lowenstein Conference Center in Roseland was an especially fitting venue for a major gathering, hosted by Lowenstein Sandler PC, of more than 150 people who helped in the passage of three major reentry bills which were signed into law by former Governor Corzine on January 11, 2010. Mr. Lowenstein founded the Institute and maintained a life-long commitment to social justice. Legislators, NJISJ staff, Second Chance Campaign members and many supporters came together to celebrate the passage of three bills that create a more fair playing field for former prisoners who are returning home.



The reception was a time to celebrate with colleagues and friends. From left to right: Thurman Barnes, Assemblywoman Coleman, Joseph Blaney, and Senator Cunningham



Inspiring words during an elegant reception at Lowenstein Sandler. From left to right: John Farmer, Cornell William Brooks, Senator Cunningham, Assemblywoman Coleman, and Doug Eakeley

The program was celebratory. Following a lovely cocktail reception catered by Lowenstein Sandler, Douglas Eakeley, member of the firm and a founding trustee of NJISJ, welcomed everyone. He commented on the importance of the legislation, stating, “this reform was the product of a wonderful

collaboration of legislative leaders, civic and religious organizations and concerned citizens.” He was followed by Cornell William Brooks, Executive Director of NJISJ, who gave a history of how the bills came into being, and the time, effort and energy required to bring them to fruition.

He also touched on the moral value of the bills, saying, “if a person has paid his debt to society with the currency known as responsibility, then we owe it to him to give him a second chance.” Two prominent sponsors of the bills, Assemblywoman Bonnie Watson Coleman and Senator Sandra Cunningham, then recounted how much had been done, and exhorted the group that there was more to do. “We have just scratched the surface,” Assemblywoman Coleman stated. The speakers recognized that, although this was a celebration, a strong commitment for future action was required. As Cunningham boldly said, “if this is a commitment ceremony, I commit.” John Farmer, President of the Board of NJISJ and Dean of Rutgers Law School-Newark, ended the program with remarks, thanking all who had worked tirelessly to make this historic change that would affect so many families. He observed that, “victories in this area have been few and far between, so we have every right to celebrate.”

NJISJ Partners with Legislators on Three Reentry Bills

The legislation will enable previously incarcerated men and women to rebuild their lives as productive and responsible citizens.

The process that led to the design, introduction and ultimate passage of these bills has been described by the New York Times as, “a model for the nation.”

NJISJ became involved when former State Attorney General Anne Milgram convened a series of public hearings to help identify and prioritize the issues. As a result, NJISJ, and particularly Rick Greenberg, as well as many members of the Second Chance Campaign, participated in the process and helped to synthesize the information. Drawing on years of Institute work gleaned from the Reentry Roundtable series, NJISJ assisted in creating the language of the bills, which culminated in their passage on January 11, 2010.

The bills create a more level playing field for ex-offenders returning home. This significant statutory reform would not have gone forward without critical research, analysis, legislative testimony and advocacy provided by the NJISJ legal program.



From left to right: Senators Theresa Ruiz, Nia Gill, and former Senator Ron Rice standing with Cornell William Brooks



Former Senate President Codey leads voting for the reentry bills

People who have paid their debt to society following a nonviolent drug offense, have a difficult time supporting their families. The Strengthening Women and Families Act, establishes a commission to strengthen bonds between incarcerated parents and their children. New Jersey, like New York and Pennsylvania, now supports children and families by making food stamps and TANF (temporary assistance for needy

families) available for individuals

with felony drug convictions, allowing these individuals to better support their families in these tough economic times. It will also increase access to stable housing and nourishment for many New Jersey children, and it will establish the Division on Women as the semiannual depository for all female inmate complaints. It assigns a DOC Deputy Commissioner to have specific responsibility for issues involving mothers and children. In addition, the bill provides incarcerated individuals with information about child support modifications, among other things. In certain communities with as many as 1 in 8 children with a parent behind bars, this bill serves to provide necessary aid in a crippling situation.

Few of us can imagine what it would be like to seek employment without identity documents. Likewise, no one can compete for jobs when they are ill-educated, ill-equipped and anonymous. The Fair Release and Reentry Act provides individuals leaving prison with written notification of fines, voting rights, and expungement options. Furthermore, it provides for an MVC-issued ID card; a birth certificate, a list of prison programs participation and a copy of medical records and a Social Security card for everyone coming home. Among many other things, it eliminates the post-release Medicaid enrollment gap, and it establishes a Prisoner Reentry Commission, on which NJISJ will serve.



From left to right: Cornell William Brooks, Assemblyman Lou Greenwald, Rick Greenberg

The third bill deals with educating prisoners. It requires (in a phased in manner) the DOC to ensure that incarcerated individuals attain a 12th grade education proficiency level. It permits the Department of Correction's education department to expand its use of digital and online technology. Additionally, it reviews vocational programs to meet the demands for job skills and marketing programs. With the average inmate reading on a 5th grade level, and computing on a 6th grade level, New Jersey now joins 20 states that make education in prison mandatory. Not only do people serve time, but the time serves them well, so that they will have a chance to participate in the 21st century economy.

NJISJ is extremely proud of the role that its legal project played in partnering with legislators to provide the information, public input and skilled analysis in order to bring these bills forward. While this is a good beginning, there is still much more to be accomplished. We have a full agenda for the future and we will keep you posted as the programs to help the disadvantaged move forward.

PLEASE SAVE THE DATE
NJISJ ANNUAL GALA DINNER
JUNE 9th, 2010
Nanina's in the Park
Reception 6:00
Dinner and Program 7:00

60 Park Pl Suite 511 | Newark, NJ 07102 US

4/19/2010

Campaigns : Campaign Preview

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