

# The New York Times

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January 21, 2005

EDITORIAL

## New Strategies for Curbing Recidivism

State and federal lawmakers are finally realizing that controlling prison costs means controlling recidivism - by helping newly released people establish viable lives once they get out of jail. A report just out from a group of 100 policy makers, including elected officials, established by the Council of State Governments argues that the country needs to reinvent its corrections system. In the place of a system that locks people up and shoves them out the door when their sentences are finished, the report, by the Re-Entry Policy Council, envisions "re-entry" services that reintegrate ex-offenders into their communities.

This line of thinking is long overdue. The United States has 2.1 million people behind bars on any given day - nearly seven times the number three decades ago. Corrections costs have risen accordingly - from about \$9 billion a year two decades ago to more than \$60 billion a year today - making corrections the second-fastest-growing expense in state budgets, after Medicaid. The portrait of the inmate population offered in the report leaves no doubt as to why two-thirds of the people who leave prison are rearrested within a few years. These people were marginally employable before they went to jail - nearly half earned less than \$600 a month. They are even less employable afterward, thanks to criminal records. In addition, many of them suffer from mental illnesses that often go untreated after release.

The social services necessary for successful re-entry are virtually nonexistent in most communities. The new report offers an exhaustive prescription for changing the status quo: states will need to coax disparate parts of their systems to work together. State officials will also have to re-educate voters, who have grown accustomed to a corrections philosophy that begins and ends with merely locking people up for the longest possible period of time. These policies will need to change, and quickly, if the states are to solve the recidivism problem and develop programs that help former inmates find homes, training, jobs and places in their communities. Until that happens, corrections costs will continue to soar, siphoning off billions of dollars that could be used for more constructive purposes.