



State of New Jersey STATE PAROLE BOARD

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Media Release

**For Immediate Release:
Monday, October 03, 2005**

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State Parole Board Reports Success To Governor Codey *New Community Partnership Programs Show Good First-year Results.*

(TRENTON)—State Parole Chairman John D'Amico, Jr. recently reported to Acting Governor Codey's Office on the first year results of the Parole Board's new Community Partnership Unit (CPU). The Unit assessed its own performance for its first year of operations in an August 19, 2005 "Update" to Diane Legreide, Chief of Management and Operations for the Governor's Office.

D'Amico started the Community Partnership Unit based on evidence that the most effective way to keep offenders from returning to prison is to address the many obstacles that ex-prisoners meet when they attempt to return to their communities and rebuild their lives. According to D'Amico, the early results of the Unit are promising:

"Through the outstanding work of the Community Partnership Unit, and at no cost to the taxpayers, the Parole Board has been able to augment its efforts to foster the rehabilitation of ex-prisoners by developing effective re-entry partnerships with other government agencies, foundations, corporations, labor unions, non-profit organizations, faith based entities, community groups, and individual volunteers."

Citing a modest start for the Unit of only one employee in July of 2004, D'Amico reported that the Unit has expanded to its current size of three full-time employees and one part-time employee. D'Amico's stated mission for the office is to forge lasting partnerships between the Parole Board and other government agencies and community support groups to help ex-prisoners rebuild their lives and stay out of prison.

As a way of developing beneficial relationships with the groups that the State Parole Board needs for its re-entry program, the Board has hosted a series of Community Partnership Conferences with local colleges and faith-based organizations. D'Amico's Update to the Governor lists five such conferences: Atlantic City (May 2004), Newark (September 2004), Camden (January 2005), Paterson (May 2005) and a Trenton-Princeton area conference on September 6, 2005 at Princeton University in conjunction with Trenton Mayor Douglas Palmer's Safer Cities Initiative for the Capital City.

Each Community Partnership Conference features workshops focusing on the key barriers for ex-prisoners returning to the community: employment and education, housing, gang membership, addiction services, mental health, faith-based supports and family rebuilding and restoration. At each conference, the Board has created local task forces to address these issues. The task forces are composed of volunteers from the communities to which large numbers of parolees and ex-offenders return upon release from incarceration.

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The effort has paid off. The Parole Board's community partnership task forces have produced proposals for:

- Faith-based substance abuse counseling and group therapy for more than 500 parolees through "The Most Excellent Way."
- Housing assistance, job referrals, transportation, food, clothing and haircuts provided by the Salvation Army, churches and non-profit organizations throughout the state.
- The development of permanent housing for parolees on land owned by the Catholic Diocese of Camden.
- Renewed commitments by Atlantic City's Casino/Resort industry to extend employment opportunities to parolees.
- A permanent "Re-entry Task Force" in Newark to oversee new addiction services and housing locations.
- A cooperative venture between the Parole Board and the Offender Aid and Restoration program in Newark for the creation of permanent housing for female ex-offenders.
- Support from several churches in Camden to provide faith-based supports and counseling to individual parolees through the South Jersey Aftercare program.
- An initiative focused on mental health and addiction services in Paterson.

In his Partnership Update to the Governor's Office, D'Amico also cited a recently concluded Memorandum of Understanding between the State Parole Board and the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development. That agreement enlists the Department of Labor in the Parole Board's efforts to help parolees find good jobs once they return to their communities. D'Amico noted that over 2,500 parolees had already registered with Labor's employment assistance programs and at least 200 parolees had secured permanent positions taking advantage of this resource.

The Parole Board's Community Programs Division has also partnered with New Jersey's Bureau of Vital Statistics to help parolees secure certified birth records: records which are often crucial to obtaining employment, training, education and other public benefits.

D'Amico's Update to the Governor's Office confirms that building effective community partnerships is a key strategy in the effort to break the expensive and vicious cycle of criminal recidivism, help ex-offenders truly rebuild their lives by becoming constructive citizens of their communities and provide a better and safer quality of life in New Jersey. Plans are already in place for future Community Partnership conferences in Ocean County later this year and for Vineland and Jersey City in early 2006.

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