

New Jersey Reentry Roundtable
October, 2002 – October 2003
Co-Chairs: John Farmer and Stanley Van Ness

The New Jersey Institute for Social Justice and the New Jersey Public Policy Research Institute are pleased to announce the creation of the New Jersey Reentry Roundtable, a year long initiative gathering policy makers, researchers, service providers, and other key stakeholders to assess and develop a strategic response to the challenge of prisoner reentry in New Jersey. With over 16,000 individuals returning to their communities from state prison last year alone, one-third of them without any ongoing parole supervision, and a prison population almost five times what it was twenty-five years ago, this is a critical time to begin a focused, statewide effort to analyze reentry in New Jersey, and to refine our approach based on the best learning available.

The Reentry Roundtable concept is based upon a model developed at the national level by the Urban Institute, a policy research organization based in Washington, D.C. The Urban Institute, which is engaged in a broad array of research and policy development activity focused on prisoner reentry, is the convener of a national Reentry Roundtable. For the past two years, they have brought together academics, policy makers and practitioners representing a variety of perspectives, with the goal of building understanding of prisoner reentry and advancing policies and innovations that reflect solid research. Their approach understands reentry as not simply a criminal justice concern, but rather a phenomenon with implications for multiple policy domains, such as health, community development, workforce development, child and family issues, racial justice, and law enforcement. With the Urban Institute's assistance, a number of states and municipalities have begun developing local versions of the roundtable model, linking their communities to the national conversation and providing a locus for strategic planning on the state and municipal level.

The New Jersey Reentry Roundtable will build on this national model and the experience of other states. In five sessions over the course of the next year (outlined on the next page), we intend to gather a cross section of state officials, academic researchers, business and labor leaders, members of community and faith-based organizations, health care providers, law enforcement, representatives of the philanthropic community and others to address the key questions about prisoner reentry in our state. Each session will be informed by presentations and papers distributed in advance to participants to provide empirical information about the session topic. These will identify significant issues and policy choices facing the state, and discuss existing approaches, and what we know about them. During the sessions, participants will have the opportunity to begin identifying the components and partners for a New Jersey reentry strategy. It is our goal that this discussion, and further exploration of the policy and programming options discussed, will continue between sessions, and guide policy making, research agendas and program development even before the year long initiative ends.

Participation will be by invitation only to ensure a consistent group of participants, to keep the numbers at a level that will permit engagement and interaction among all attendees, and to achieve a diversity of perspective. Space will be available, however, for observers. The sessions will not be open to the press.

New Jersey Reentry Roundtable: Outline of Sessions

Session 1: Introduction

October 22nd, 2002
9:30 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

This session will include an overview of prisoner reentry in New Jersey, in the national context, presented by the Urban Institute, based on their research and existing state data, as well as additional presentations on how reentry happens in New Jersey, based on initial results from GIS mapping of inmates and parolees in Camden and Essex Counties being done by the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, the Open Society Institute, and the State Parole Board. Introductory discussions will address the current state of knowledge about reentry, existing approaches in the state, as well as Roundtable goals and process.

Session 2: Health, Mental Health and Substance Abuse

January 24, 2003 (9:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.)

This session will focus on the significant factors of health, mental health and substance abuse and their impact on the reentry problem from an individual, institutional and community perspective as well as the implications for public safety.

Session 3: Employment and Community Economic Development Issues

April 11, 2003 (9:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.)

The April session will address barriers and opportunities to facilitating employment for returning prisoners. It will also address how returning prisoners affect the economic potential, safety and stability of communities to which they return.

Session 4: Juvenile Reentry

June 20, 2003 (9:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.)

While we will be addressing issues that affect youth throughout the prior sessions, in July we focus on the particular concerns around juvenile reentry, both as an independent challenge and as it relates to the individuals who end up in the adult system.

Session 5: Conclusion and Planning

September, 2003 (9:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.)

The final session will be devoted to pulling together the work of the past year and developing a strategic plan for the way forward. Session participants will assist in developing summary materials and comments for distribution and consideration prior to the session. A final report, with issue analysis and policy recommendations will be issued following the session.