

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

Improve Prisoner Reentry and Reduce Recidivism Support the Second Chance Act

April 17, 2013

Dear Colleague:

Please join me in supporting funding for the Second Chance Act in Fiscal Year 2014 by signing the attached letter to the Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations Subcommittee.

The Second Chance Act, which passed with overwhelming bipartisan support in April 2008, has provided critical investment in prisoner reentry programs working to reduce high recidivism rates and support communities. By investing in evidence-based, effective solutions to recidivism, the Second Chance Act promotes safer communities, stronger families, and smarter fiscal policies.

Examples of challenges addressed by the Second Chance Act include:

- **Mental health-** The incidence of serious mental illnesses is two to four times higher among prisoners than it is among the general population.
- **Substance abuse-** Three quarters of those returning from prison have a history of substance use disorders. Over 70 percent of prisoners with serious mental illnesses also have a substance use disorder.
- **Housing and homelessness-** More than 10 percent of people entering prisons and jails are homeless in the months before their incarceration. For those with mental illness, the rates are double.
- **Education-** Two out of every five prisoners and jail inmates lack a high school diploma or its equivalent.
- **Children and families-** Approximately 2 million children in the U.S. have parents who are currently incarcerated, and more than 10 million minor children have parents who have come under some form of criminal justice supervision at some point in their children's lives.

We must continue to make this investment. The programs authorized by the Second Chance Act address these issues and are proving effective. Recidivism rates are declining nationwide through the evidence-based practices that are supported by Second Chance.

Please join us in supporting funding for this vital initiative in the FY 2014 Commerce, Justice, and Science appropriations bill. Please contact Kelsey Kobelt at 4-7703 or Kelsey_Kobelt@judiciary-dems.senate.gov to sign on to the letter. The deadline for signing on is April 24.

Sincerely,



PATRICK LEAHY

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 26, 2013

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Chair, Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
144 Dirksen Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on
Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related
Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
123 Hart Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Mikulski and Ranking Member Shelby:

Thank you for your leadership on reentry and recidivism issues, including support of the Second Chance Act. We're writing in support of the President's FY2014 budget request of \$119 million for reentry programs authorized by the Second Chance Act.

As you know, the Second Chance Act represents an important federal investment in strategies to increase public safety and reduce recidivism. This legislation passed with bipartisan support in 2008 and authorizes funding for the development and coordination of reentry services, such as employment training, substance abuse treatment, and mentoring.

This investment in effective reentry programs is working. A 2012 report issued by the Council of State Governments Justice Center indicates states that have received Second Chance funding are dramatically reducing their statewide recidivism rates:

- In recent years, Vermont's recidivism rate has fallen by **11 percent**. There has been an expansion of substance abuse programming including increased capacity of community-based substance abuse treatment providers and recovery centers, as well as the addition of a residential treatment option. Based on early successes, the state legislature has set a goal of reducing the state's recidivism rate to 30 percent by 2015.
- Michigan officials invested heavily in the state's Prisoner Reentry Program, prioritizing funding for housing, employment, and other transition support services in order to provide the most effective community-based programming for released individuals. Between 2000 and 2008, Michigan's recidivism rate fell by **28 percent**.
- Kansas has seen a **15 percent** reduction in their recidivism rate in the past four years. They established the Kansas Reentry Policy Council, invested in reentry initiatives at the county level, and partnered with local communities that were experiencing the highest rates of return from prison to connect released individuals more effectively to housing and workforce development services.
- The recidivism rate has fallen by **9 percent** in Mississippi since 2005 and is now just 28 percent. Corrections officials enhance their evidence-based practices and validated risk assessment tools to help ensure that individuals with the most acute needs were targeted for treatment and services.
- Texas has seen a significant decline in recidivism of **22 percent** since 2000 by expanding the capacity of existing treatment programs and alternatives to incarceration, including transitional housing for parolees, in-prison treatment for substance abuse, and outpatient substance abuse treatment for people under probation supervision.

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
The Honorable Richard Shelby
April 26, 2013
Page 2 of 2

- Oregon's recidivism rate has declined by **11 percent** since 2003. In 2003, Oregon enacted legislation requiring that prevention, treatment, and intervention programs intended to reduce future criminal behavior must be evidence based. The state provides every person released from prison with an individualized reentry plan that is informed by criminogenic risk assessments.
- Ohio has reduced its recidivism rate by **21 percent** since 2003 by enhancing evidence-based programming, using risk assessment, and improving staff training in offender case management. Ohio has also developed new ways to engage families during an offender's incarceration through the adoption of a Family Orientation Program, the formation of a Family Council, and innovative policy changes calling for greater family involvement during confinement and reentry.

Lower recidivism rates have major implications for public safety. Significant declines in recidivism represent thousands of averted crimes while freeing criminal justice leaders to focus on protecting communities. Moreover, falling recidivism represents major cost savings for states. Since 1982, only healthcare has been a bigger driver of rising state budgets than increasing corrections costs.

To sustain these successes, continued investment in the Second Chance Act is needed. Research shows that more than four in ten people released from prison or jail return within three years. Yet research also confirms that comprehensive, coordinated services can help people returning from prison and jails succeed in their communities. Since Second Chance began, nearly 500 grants have been awarded across 48 states and the District of Columbia.

By providing the resources needed to coordinate reentry services and policies at the state, tribal, and local level, the Second Chance Act ensures that the tax dollars spent on corrections do not simply fuel a revolving door in and out of prison and jail. Please support funding for the Second Chance Act.

Sincerely,