

Priority Issue: Reentry

As Ohio's prison population exceeds 50,000, at an annual cost of over \$1.2 billion dollars, the need to focus on Reentry services is critical and clear. In Cuyahoga County alone, 6,000 prisoners return to Cleveland annually, the highest number in the State. These individuals and their families face extreme challenges with respect to securing employment, safe housing, valid forms of identification and health services, especially mental health.

Ohio United Way, through its member agencies has been involved with Reentry programs for many years, but due to record high numbers of inmates, combined with the economic environment faced when released in 2010, expanded Reentry focus by local and state officials and organizations is warranted.

Of particular concern is:

- Prison populations continue to rise, with about half of released inmates returning to prison within 3 years.
- Ohio's inmate population continues a growth trend that could reach 56,000 in 8 years, overextending a system designed to house 38,300. Cost estimates for new prisons exceed \$1 billion dollars to build and maintain.
- Average annual costs per incarcerated person exceed \$25,000.
- Ohio has more than 11,000 youths with one or both parents being sent to prison annually. Each year one or both parents of more than 13,000 children are released from prison, highlighting the need for family involvement in Reentry.
- 50% of Ohio's incarcerated adults have minor children at home.
- 60% of inmates spend less than a year in jail, raising the question of whether alternative diversion programs might be more successful and cost effective.

Positive signs include:

- The establishment and success of Reentry Court can be found in Richland County, where the re-arrest rate for graduates is 4% within one year of release, about 1 tenth of the national average, and in Stark County where Reentry Court operations have reduced the recidivism rate to 16%. These Courts, through advanced monitoring and supervision, help to limit growth in prison population while maintaining public safety.
- The recent passage of House Bill 130 and its steps to address over-incarceration, includes the promotion of substance abuse treatment in place of incarceration for some individuals, enhances opportunities for early release, and provides for identification cards and additional access to social services, training and employment.
- The establishment of statewide initiatives including the Ex-Offender Reentry Coalition, Citizen Circles, Comprehensive Anti-Gang Initiative, and the Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections' Family Orientation Programs.
- The work of local programs including the Cleveland Office of Reentry, Cleveland Transition Center, Summit County Reentry Network and the West Central Ohio Reentry Coalition.

Ohio United Way requests:

Increased funding to sustain existing Reentry Courts and to introduce these Courts in additional Ohio counties.

Legislators support Senate Bill 22 that addresses Ohio's over-crowded prison system and eliminates drug laws that unfairly target specific segments of Ohio's population.

Expansion of programs that support and strengthen families during and after incarceration, designed to prevent Reentry.