



Illinois Reentry Council Annual Report March 2021 – December 2022

I. Introductory Summary

There are over 28,000 people in Illinois prisons and over 225,000 under some form of criminal legal system supervision. The ramifications of mass incarceration in Illinois have become more evident over time, disproportionately impacting low-income people from under-resourced communities. Pre-trial incarceration, electronic monitoring, prison, truth in sentencing, community supervision, the stigma of incarceration, and a range of other conditions and policies surrounding the carceral system create enormous hurdles for individuals looking to rebuild their lives after contact with the criminal legal system. The onus is often left with formerly incarcerated individuals and their loved ones to navigate the conditions of their release (mandatory drug treatment or anger management classes or prohibition of contact with other people who have arrest or conviction records), obtain legal employment, restore family relationships, access healthcare, and make successful transitions back into the community. The transition is especially difficult for those with marginalized identities (women, LGBTQ, seniors, etc.), compounded by other factors like mental health or chronic health issues. Various organizations, coalitions, and groups have sought to address barriers or gaps for people who have made contact with the criminal legal system, but it is clear that the reentry process for many is complex and that it is necessary to alter major policies and practices on multiple fronts.

Established in March 2021¹, the Illinois Reentry Council convenes members committed to creating an equitable and effective reentry system of support for people leaving prisons and jails and supporting them in their return to the community. This *Illinois Reentry Council Annual Report* describes progress towards this commitment thus far by chronicling the development of the principles and goals in the collaborative process, outlining the progress, and explaining the process for developing strategic initiatives to work on in the upcoming years.

Today, the Illinois Reentry Council (IRC) is comprised of over ninety members from across Illinois, including individuals who have been incarcerated, elected and appointed officials, advocates, service providers, academics, and philanthropic representatives. The Council began its work by bringing together stakeholders from all sectors to acknowledge the need for a collective effort to define what a successful reentry system of support would include. While this step may now seem insignificant, the very convening of the Council created the important foundation to change policy and practices.

The meetings have been used to share and review pertinent reentry information from Illinois and around the country, oversee the strategic plan creation and implementation, and devise or improve relevant policies and practices. Between quarterly meetings, IRC members participate in six workgroups where they examine specific issue areas such as economic opportunity, support services, and housing to design and effectuate the priorities for the strategic plan.

¹ See Appendix 1 for a more complete history

II. Council Operational Overview

A. Council Design

The Council is comprised of people who have the authority and capacity to create a new Illinois reentry system. Some have responsibility and power to change government and private sector practices and policies. Others have the lived experience to define what needs to be changed and what needs to be substituted. Many are skilled in advocacy and policy design and can advance changes through the government and the private and not-for-profit sectors. Researchers and those in philanthropy provide the factual and analytic framework and resources to support the movements for change. The strategic plan the members developed offers the roadmap for their participation and implementation of change.

B. Charge and Principles²

The Illinois Reentry Council began with a charge to bring together those who intend to create an equitable and effective process for people leaving prisons and jails to support them in their return to the community. Since its inception, the charge has evolved to a commitment to a transformative, holistic, and asset-based approach to reentry by addressing structural barriers that impede one's reintegration, fostering collaboration, following the leadership of system-impacted individuals, and ensuring self-determination is infused within reentry policies, programming, and practices.³

C. Members⁴

Recruitment efforts for building the IRC member base targeted key stakeholders with influence over the critical material needs, policies, and practices that impact the lives of returning residents. They include a diverse group of co-chairs, including people with lived experience to help guide and leaders in state government, including: The Council is chaired by Director Yaacov Delaney (JEO Initiative, Lt. Gov.'s Office), Chairman King Harris (IL Housing Development Authority), Secretary Grace Hou (IL Dept. of Human Services), Director Rob Jeffreys (IL Dept. of Corrections), Marlon Chamberlain (Heartland Alliance), and Ahmadou Dramé (Illinois Justice Project) and was initially project managed by Illinois Reentry Council Director, Korynna Lopez (Illinois Justice Project). The Directors of the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity co-chair and participate in our workgroups as well.

III. Approach and Process

In March 2021, the Illinois Reentry Council was convened to create an equitable statewide reentry system for people leaving jails and prisons. Following the IRC's creation, guest speakers from various jurisdictions – including New York, Ohio, Delaware, and Pennsylvania – joined IRC meetings and shared their respective approaches, best and promising reentry practices that we could adopt in Illinois. Their insights helped shape the trajectory of the IRC's growth and initial policy and implementation successes, which are outlined below.

² See Appendix 2 for initial charge

³ See Appendix 3 for revised charge

⁴ See Appendix 4 for full membership list in

At each of its full Council and working group meetings, members have identified issues to address, which have now been incorporated into a strategic plan⁵.

By convening quarterly, the IRC provides a platform for members to foster relationships across the public, not for profit and private sectors; glean insights from research and presentations; identify pressing challenges in reentry; and exchange information about their respective reentry work. Between quarterly meetings, IRC members participated in six working group meetings focused on the important aspects of a comprehensive reentry system including, but not limited to, housing, employment, and support services.⁶ Some additional obstacles identified were: lack of resources for aging or disabled formerly incarcerated individuals, lack of state identification cards to access public benefits, lack of access to education and career programs inside of Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) facilities, difficulty staying connected to family and support outside the prisons, and an ongoing housing crisis.

Each Workgroup examines its specific issue areas and defines the elements of reentry to be addressed under the umbrella of their workgroup topic. The groups meet between IRC quarterly meetings and hear from experts in their respective fields to gain insight on best practices that can inform how best to execute and evaluate the implementation of workgroup and overarching Illinois Reentry Council goals. They also collaborate with other workgroups around overlapping issues by coordinating action plans and developing a more robust strategy. During quarterly meetings, workgroup co-chairs offer the full Council recommendations on goals and implementation strategies to incorporate in the strategic plan based on the discussions with workgroup members and external partners with subject-matter expertise.

Today, IRC workgroups continue to meet to develop goals, success measures and implementation timetables for the IRC strategic plan. There is increased involvement, investment and mobilization of state agencies, including the Secretary of State, Illinois Department on Aging (IDoA), Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA), Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), and the Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA). Increasingly, these agencies are utilizing their own resources to support returning residents – and this level of government involvement in reentry is unprecedented in Illinois.

The IRC members engaged and invested in the design of the long-term reentry strategy for Illinois. Future work will continue prioritizing the thoughts and ideas of formerly incarcerated people and take a healing-centered approach (as emphasized by Council members), while developing clear plans for an employment model, service site model, and evaluations of programs and funding allocated to promising, and potentially replicable initiatives.

IV. Reentry Progress in Illinois

Illinois Reentry Council members have made important strides with their respective organizations, alliances, or coalitions and pushed legislation, ordinances, and campaigns to supporting reentry efforts. Some examples of their work are:

- Women’s Justice Initiative: created the Reclamation Project (link [here](#))

⁵ See Appendix 5 for Strategic Plan link

⁶ See work group list and charges in Appendix 6

- Chicago Reentry Office was created and funded with \$13 million (link to press release [here](#))
- Safer Foundation acquired residential buildings and created a master lease agreement to facilitate housing for returning residents
- A legislatively mandated Task Force Chaired by Orlando Mayorga, McCormick Foundation Fellow for Reentry, issued its Report on Higher Education in Prison (link [here](#))
- An alliance of housing advocates and the Illinois Realtors Association are working together to limit municipal legal obstacles to reentry

Preparing People for Reentry While Still Incarcerated: Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC)

- IDOC, working with the Department of Healthcare and Family Services and the Department of Human Services, is enrolling incarcerated persons into the Medicaid program prior to release. In January 2022, approximately 44% of the people exiting IDOC facilities were enrolled in the Medicaid program – which is nearly double the percentage enrolled before being released in January 2021.
- IDOC is focusing more of its resources on reentry and housing by creating reentry units in all its facilities and expanding its recently established re-entry unit with three additional full-time employees. New staff positions include two Regional (North and South) Reentry Managers and one Statewide Specialized Housing Coordinator.
- IDOC is also in the final stages of testing a housing needs assessment tool funded by the MacArthur Foundation and another anonymous foundation. The tool will help IDOC identify the housing needs of incarcerated persons prior to their release.
- IDOC is adjusting the internal policies and practices to allow for individualized case planning, including reentry pathways that will make facilities mission-driven based on specific designations of sentence length and individuals’ IDOC assessments.
- IDOC also changed its Mandatory Supervised Release policies resulting in the lowest levels of community supervision in decades over individuals released from prisons who are found to be low risk by IDOC’s assessment tool.
- IDOC now contracts with organizations to serve individuals with serious mental illness diagnoses and has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with IDHS to enroll returning residents in SSI/SSDI benefit programs.
- The Secretary of State ID program transformed from a pilot project of mobile units into a permanent, IDOC-housed partnership and program functioning at all prisons. So far, this program has issued more than 12,000 identification cards to individuals leaving incarceration after issuing none for many decades.

Housing and the Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA)

- More than \$80 million in new public sector funding towards reentry housing, supports and services for returning residents was created at the local, county and state levels in 2022.
- Building on its pilot program with IDOC in 2019, IHDA is increasing its investments in reentry housing. In March 2022, IHDA received 36 applications for its \$16 million Housing for Justice Involved Persons Program request for applications (RFA). 28 of award winners were recently announced in July 2022.
- IHDA is also in the process of adding peer mentorship and supportive service components to the 3-year, 75-person reentry housing pilot program.
- IHDA also added points to its Qualified Allocation Plan (QAP) to encourage developers and housing providers to house people with records.

Other Agencies

- The Illinois Department of Aging is working to put housing and healthcare supports in place for people being released under the Joe Coleman Act, which allows people in custody suffering from a terminal illness or medical incapacitation to file a medical release application.
- IDOC and the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) entered a new partnership to provide managed mental health care and coordination services to individuals with Serious Mental Illness (SMI) designations at the Joliet Inpatient Treatment Center (JITC). The JITC is dually-run by IDOC and IDHS.

This, of course, does not capture all the reentry efforts across Illinois in the last twenty months, as IRC members continue to advocate for and achieve a transformative, holistic, and asset-based approach to reentry every day. The draft strategic plan offers the opportunity over the upcoming years to continue to implement change which will lead to the creation of a system in Illinois to support people leaving incarceration in their successful reentry.

VI. Conclusion

The criminal legal system in Illinois is currently not structured to provide a comprehensive reentry pathway for those leaving jails and prisons. The absence of such a pathway and persistent exclusion from the housing, healthcare, education, and the legal job market puts those who have been impacted by incarceration at risk for further involvement with the criminal legal system. Council members are committed to a racially equitable, transformative, holistic, and asset-based approach to reentry by addressing structural barriers that impede one's reintegration. The Council, guided by its strategic plan, is the venue and the catalyst to change the experience of reentry in Illinois.

Appendix 1: Timeline and History

The Illinois Reentry Council is the next iteration of the evolution of collaboration and strategy for reentry that follows the Re-Entry Housing Task Force and its foundation.

The Re-Entry Housing Task Force (RHTF) was initiated to implement recommendations from [Re-Entry Issues in Illinois](#), a report jointly published in July 2019 by Illinois Justice Project and Metropolitan Planning Council, which was a culmination of multi-year research and interviews of criminal legal system reform advocates, housing advocates, and government actors. Launching in December 2019, the RHTF was comprised of over 50 members, many of whom were the advocates and government partners who participated and supported the research for the report. Under the leadership of its three co-chairs—Illinois Housing and Development Authority’s (IHDA) Board Chair King Harris, Illinois Department of Human Services Secretary Grace Hou, and Illinois Department of Corrections Director Rob Jeffreys, the RHTF met as a full group quarterly, convened for a special session in response to Covid-19 and decarceration efforts, and worked on implementation through three workgroups that met monthly. The Supporting Re-Entry Programming workgroup was co-chaired by Betsy Benito—then with the Corporation for Supportive Housing, Victor Dickson with Safer Foundation, King Harris with IHDA’s Board, and Quintin Williams—then with Heartland Alliance. The Removing Barriers to Re-Entry workgroup was co-chaired by Ahmadou Dramé—then with Metropolitan Planning Council, Maria Moon with Chicago Area Fair Housing Alliance, Jennifer Parrack with IDOC and Alan Zais with Northern Illinois Regional Affordable Community Housing (NI ReACH). The Expanding Re-Entry Housing workgroup was co-chaired by Deanne Benos with Women’s Justice Institute, Yaacov Delaney with the Justice, Equity, and Opportunity Initiative in Lt. Governor Stratton’s Office, David Doig of Chicago Neighborhood Initiatives, and Marie Claire Tran-Leung—then with Shriver Center on Poverty Law. Additionally, an ad hoc finance group met to focus on building up a foundational understanding of financing for various housing strategies.

While the task force advanced the understanding of the problems, identified some solutions, and implemented a number them, members came to understand that reentry issues go beyond housing and needed to be addressed by a broader group in a broader context. A summary of the task force’s progress and planning was developed and used as a guiding document for the initiation of the Illinois Reentry Council. Members of the task force became core members of the new Council and others joined as it became clear that a new system could only be designed and implemented if a broader group of people committed themselves to this effort.

With funding from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the RHTF evolved into the Illinois Reentry Council at an opportune time as synergy around reentry was deepening as new pilot programs and initiatives were started. The need for strong and clear reentry supports and processes was exacerbated by Covid-19 because congregate settings like jails and prisons became hot spots. A key to protect people from the infection and slow its spread was to decarcerate; this increased the need for main reentry supports like housing, with an added strain that housing needed to also not be congregate styles because of the pandemic. The lack of enough reentry housing options, clear processes, and ease, speed, and coordination for one to reenter became evident to more people very quickly.

In the Spring of 2020, a number of area foundations⁷ came together and created a demonstration pilot to serve 30-50 people leaving incarceration and to document what anecdotal information about what the obstacles to reentry are and what steps can be taken to overcome them. The Safer Foundation and TASC participated in the pilot, and its work and findings helped to define the activities and focus of the Council. The pilot recently will stop admitting clients in December 2022, but based on the work completed, a preliminary report suggests that the supports provided by the service providers offered a successful path to reentry and the obstacles which were documented can, in most instances, be overcome with proper support.⁸

Appendix 2: Initial Charge and Principles

The Illinois Reentry Council will bring together those who intend to create an equitable and effective process for people leaving prisons and jails to support them in their return to the community. Members will determine a long-term strategy to design an improved system and support its implementation.

Members will include those impacted by and responsible for the process, including people leaving incarceration; executive, judicial and legislative elected officials; government administrators; service providers; law enforcement; researchers; and advocates.

The Council will meet quarterly to:

1. Establish, and revise as necessary, a set of principles to guide the Council's work.
2. Do an initial review and report regularly on the current status of reentry in Illinois.
3. Explicitly address racism in the system.
4. Monitor the progress of the reentry reform strategy.
5. Provide a forum for those who have experienced the reentry system to present information about how to improve it.
6. At meetings—and in work groups as necessary—scrutinize and assess the various elements of the system including, but not limited to:
 - Individualized prerelease support
 - The purpose and design of any [individualized] post-release supervision
 - Provision of necessary support for those immediately released, including public services such as identification materials, healthcare, income support, housing, employment training and job placement, and other wraparound services
 - Obstacles in the system which make it impossible or extremely difficult for people to successfully reenter, including policies and practices
7. Review existing international, national, and local research about reentry.
8. Help design and monitor an evaluation system, informed by and including those who have experienced reentry, to assess the efficacy of elements of the reentry system.
9. Determine necessary resources to support a model reentry system and identify ways to secure those resources.
10. Publish a report annually that describes the implementation and human outcomes of the reentry strategy progress.

⁷ Chicago Community Trust, Comer Family Foundation, Circle of Service Foundation, JB & MK Pritzker Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, The MacArthur Foundation, The Robert R. McCormick Foundation, Polk Bros. Foundation.

⁸ See preliminary report in Appendix 7. A final report will be available in early 2023

The Council created the following initial principles:

Overall:

1. People who have been convicted and served time in prison are entitled to support to permit them to return successfully to the community.
2. The measure of effectiveness of the state and local corrections systems and the individuals working in those systems will be successful reentry of people who have been incarcerated, measured by the individual positive outcomes for people [which lead to no recidivism].
3. Structures and supports developed for individuals and their families should be sustainable, both fiscally and politically.
4. Impacted individuals and families should be centered in policy and service development.

While incarcerated:

5. The goal of incarceration should be rehabilitation, to promote successful reentry and community safety.
6. The prison/sentencing systems should be designed to create efficient and supportive pathways for people to leave incarceration when they are ready to successfully reenter, rather than on an arbitrary date set at the time of conviction.
7. When people are incarcerated, the prison system should be engaged in preparing them for successful reentry through effective, individualized case planning based on each individual's assets.
8. Specific, individualized, effective support services and programming such as healthcare or education should be available to people both because they are indicated by objective assessment and also so people can choose to pursue their personal goals during their incarceration.
9. Coordination and more partnerships between community-based organizations and the prison system should be established to create a process to seamlessly connect individuals to opportunities and supports.

Once released:

10. Connections to and delivery of services and other supports should be provided by organizations in communities. The goal of post-release supervision should be to accomplish successful reintegration into the community and positive individual outcomes.
11. Everyone leaving prison should be provided financial support and guidance to secure housing for at least one year if needed.
12. Support services to address individual needs and personal goals should be provided until successful, independent reentry is attained. In some cases, this may mean extended medical or financial support, as determined by objective and validated standards.

Appendix 3: Revised Charge

More Recent Commitment Statement: We are committed to fostering collaboration, following the leadership of system-impacted individuals, and ensuring self-determination is infused within reentry policies, programming, and practices. We understand that reimagining reentry to be transformative requires acknowledging the disenfranchisement and marginalization exacerbated for people leaving

incarceration and working through obstacles of building empowering supports through cultural, narrative, and structural changes. We are grateful for the contribution of our members and partners in building this Council’s vision and look forward to actualizing our goals together.

Appendix 4: Membership List

Illinois Reentry Council Membership List			
WG CC	Delrice	Adams	Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority
Member	Megan	Alderden	DePaul University
Member	Roseanna	Ander	University of Chicago Crime Lab
WG CC	Mark	Angelini	Mercy Housing Lakefront
WG CC	Gianna	Baker	Chicago Area Fair Housing Alliance
Member	Ciera (Rev.)	Bates-Chamberlain	Live Free Chicago
WG CC	Willette	Benford	City of Chicago
Member	Deanne	Benos	The Women's Justice Institute
Member	Avalon	Betts-Gaston	Safer Foundation
Member	Arthur	Bishop	Safer Foundation
Member	Clinton	Boyd Jr.	Fathers, Families and Healthy Communities
Member	David	Brint	Brinshore Development
Member	Angela	Brooks	Corporation for Supportive Housing - Illinois Program
Member	Kevin	Brown	Safer Foundation
WG CC	Michael	Cannon	Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership
Member	Rep. Kelly	Cassidy	Illinois 14th House District
Co-Chair	Marlon	Chamberlain	Heartland Alliance
Member	Angi	Chassensky	ROSC Project Coordinator
Member	Dominique	Chew	Getting to Zero IL
Member	Teneishae	Coleman	Hyphen Partners
Member	Daniel	Cooper	Metropolitan Planning Council
Member	Patrick	Covington	Cook County Alumni Association
Member	Sheriff Tom	Dart	Cook County Sheriff's Office
Co-Chair	Yaacov	Delaney	JEO, Office of the Lieutenant Governor
Member	Evelyn	Diaz	Heartland Alliance
Member	Victor	Dickson	Safer Foundation
Co-Chair	Ahmadou	Dramé	Illinois Justice Project
Member	Mary Ann	Dyar	Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority
Member	Ricardo (Ric)	Estrada	Metropolitan Family Services / CP4P
Member	Brian	Fabes	Corporate Coalition of Chicago
Member	Kristin	Faust	Illinois Housing Development Authority
Member	Nancy	Firfer	Metropolitan Mayor's Caucus
Member	Ginverva	Francesconi	Illinois Prison Project

Member	Esther	Franco-Payne	Public Welfare Foundation
Member	Gus	Fuguitt	Chicago Federation of Labor
Member	Todd	Fuller	Department of Human Services
Member	Sylvia	Garcia	Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity
Member	Augie	Ghilarducci	Second Opportunity
WG CC	Michael	Goldberg	IFF
Member	Joseph	Green	Community Support Advisory Council (Westside Health Authority)
Member	Will	Guzzardi	Illinois General Assembly
Member	Lindsey	Hammond	Restore Justice
Co-Chair	King	Harris	Illinois Housing Development Authority
Member	Adolfo	Hernandez	Office of the First Lady, MK Pritzker
Co-Chair	Grace	Hou	Illinois Department of Human Services
Member	Reginald	Howell	Illinois Housing Development Authority
Member	Renaldo	Hudson	Illinois Prison Project
Member	Rebecca	Janowitz	Cook County Justice Advisory Council
Co-Chair	Rob	Jeffreys	Illinois Department of Corrections
Member	Nneka	Jones-Tapia	Chicago Beyond
Member	Ianna	Kachoris	Chicago Community Trust
Member	Niya	Kelly	Chicago Coalition for the Homeless
Member	Emily	Krisciunas	Chicago Funders Together to End Homelessness
Member	Rep. Lindsey	LaPointe	Illinois 19th House District
Member	Anna	Laubach	McCormick Foundation
Member	Timothy	Lavery	Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority
Member	Anna	Lee	Chicago Community Trust
Member	Milicent	Lewis-McCoy	Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority
Member	Jayne	Lourash	Laborers Home Development Corp
WG CC	Reality	Lovett	Heartland Alliance – READI Chicago
Member	Sherie	Martinez	Office of the Cook County Sheriff
Member	Erwin	Mayer	St. Leonard's Ministry
WG CC	Orlando	Mayorga	JEO, Office of the Lieutenant Governor
WG CC	Matthew	McFarland	Lawndale Christian Legal Center
Member	Maria	Miller	Illinois Department of Corrections
Member	Lynne	Mock	Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority
Member	Maria	Moon	Chicago Area Fair Housing Alliance
Member	Gabriella	Nelson	Chicago Department of Housing
Member	Jackie	Newman	Springfield Housing Authorities
Member	Karin	Norrington-Reeves	Chicago-Cook Workforce Partnership
Member	Dave	Olson	Loyola University
Member	James	Pagano	Illinois Department of Corrections
Member	Bob	Palmer	Housing Action Illinois
WG CC	Jennifer	Parrack	Illinois Department of Corrections
WG CC	Colette	Payne	Women's Justice Initiative
Member	Sheila	Quirk-Bailey	Illinois Central College
Member	Jessica	Reichert	Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority
Member	Laurie Jo	Reynolds	Chicago 400 / University of Illinois - Chicago

Member	Paul	Robinson	Chicago CRED
Member	Pam	Rodriguez	Retired, TASC
Member	Jataun	Rollins	1863 Forward
WG CC	Richard	Rowe	Corporation for Supportive Housing - Illinois Program
Member	Kathy	Saltmarsh	SPAC
Member	Zach	Schrantz	St. Leonard's Ministry
Member	Peter Michael	Schuette	Our Brothers' Keepers of Southern Illinois
Member	Eric	Sirota	Shriver Center on Poverty Law
Member	Louis	Slapshak	Prison Ministry for the Diocese of Belleville, IL
Member	Matt	Smith	Cabrini Green Legal Aid
Member	Jennifer	Soble	Illinois Prison Project
Member	Sendy	Soto	City of Chicago
Member	Greg	St. Aubin	Illinois Realtors
WG CC	Floyd	Stafford	Heartland Alliance
WG CC	Nneka	Jones Tapia	Chicago Beyond
Member	Dave	Thomas	Chicago Flexible Housing Pool
Member	Cynthia	Tucker	AIDS Foundation of Chicago
Member	Neli	Vasquez Rowland	A Safe Haven
Member	Don	Villar	Chicago Federation of Labor
Member	Jennifer	Vollen-Katz	John Howard Association
WG CC	Alyssa	Williams	Illinois Department of Corrections
Member	Quintin	Williams	Joyce Foundation
Member	Tanya	Woods	Westside Justice Center
WG CC	Alan	Zais	Winnebago County Housing Authority

Appendix 5: Strategic Plan

STRATEGIC PLAN

12/11/2022

The Illinois Reentry Council is a body composed of over one hundred people from throughout Illinois committed to developing and supporting effective reentry supports and services for people with records. Chaired by a diverse group of individuals, including people with lived experience and leaders in state government, the Council holds influence over the policies and practices listed in this strategic plan that impact the lives of returning residents. The Council's co-chairs include Director Yaacov Delaney (JEO Initiative, Lt. Gov.'s Office), Chairman King Harris (IL Housing Development Authority), Secretary Grace Hou (IL Dept. of Human Services), Director Rob Jeffreys (IL Dept. of Corrections), Marlon Chamberlain (Heartland Alliance), and Ahmadou Dramé (Illinois Justice Project). These individuals work alongside the Council to implement the priorities for action and execute the Council's goals.

Members include people who have been incarcerated, those elected and appointed with authority to change the operation of existing systems, advocates, those representing groups like realtors and local mayors, service providers, academics, and those representing philanthropy. The power of this Council is derived from the shared commitment of its members to create enduring and effective reentry supports and processes for all people who have been incarcerated. While some members wield power in government, others have the knowledge necessary to design practical policies, practices, and programs; others can provide necessary services or find housing; others can mobilize public will; and others can produce potent research to establish elements for and measurements of success. Only through the combined efforts and mutual respect of its members is change possible.

Council members participate in a transformative, holistic, and asset-based approach to reentry by addressing structural barriers that impede one's reintegration, fostering collaboration, following the leadership of system-impacted individuals, emphasizing the intersectionality in how individuals are impacted, and ensuring self-determination is infused within reentry policies, programming, and practices. Transformative reentry requires acknowledging the disenfranchisement and marginalization of formerly incarcerated people and removing obstacles by building empowering supports through cultural, narrative, and structural changes.

As the Council enters its second year, this plan will provide a framework for implementation of a strengthened network of reentry policies and practices. The reentry plan reflects on-going work in Illinois and is intended to be complementary and supportive, not exclusive of other efforts. It will remain flexible and subject to change as the Council refines its work and as opportunities for change present themselves.

The purpose of the Council is to:

- Identify institutional and systemic barriers to reentry and devise policies and practices to circumvent or eliminate those obstacles.
- Identify other common challenges individuals face in reentry and collaborate to eliminate those barriers.
- Review information and hear from stakeholders about various aspects of reentry in Illinois and about reentry resources in other jurisdictions which might offer innovative ideas that could be applicable to Illinois.
- Equip IRC members with the knowledge and skills needed to advocate for improved reentry in Illinois.
- Create and oversee this strategic plan to guide the Council's work, including an annual review that evaluates its progress.
- Devise and oversee implementation of policies and practices which will permit all people to successfully reenter communities from incarceration.
- Create a forum and website where people interested in strengthening reentry processes and supports can meet one another and share information about their goals and methods for achieving the goals.

The Council includes six workgroups which:

- Define specific elements of reentry to be addressed in the workgroup, incorporate those in the strategic plan, and implement the policies and practices within the strategic plan.
- Learn from experts about best practices to execute and evaluate the implementation of the workgroups' and overarching Illinois Reentry Council's goals. Engage members of the Council and external partners with subject-matter expertise to understand the goals and to implement those aspects which they can impact.
- Collaborate with other workgroups where issues overlap.

Years Two and Three of IRC Workgroups

Goals and objectives of workgroups:

Economic Opportunity and Upward Mobility (Co-Chair: Michael Cannon – Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership, Matthew McFarland – Lawndale Christian Legal Center)

- 1) Develop regional strategies among Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) and Illinois Department of Correction (IDOC) to significantly increase access to training and employment resources.
 - a. Leverage knowledge of DCEO regional managers and IDOC reentry coordinators to codify localized strategies that will include:
 - i. Enrolling local workforce boards and Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) to increase access to staff and resources within IDOC facilities.
 - ii. Assessing potential partners to bring employer-led direct training to IDOC facilities.
 - iii. Identifying potential IDOC facilities and employer partners that are well-positioned to pilot day-release programs (likely limited in scale).
- 2) Engage employers in high-potential industries on the employment challenges individuals with records face to increase the pool of employers interested in supporting people returning from prison.
 - a. Develop a detailed understanding of current employer perspectives on hiring individuals with records, including common misconceptions and concerns.
 - b. Codify a detailed “employer messaging toolkit” to build awareness on challenges faced by individuals with records, address common employer hesitations, and inform on incentives / tools available to employers.
 - c. Design and launch targeted campaigns to enroll employers to creating quality, family-sustaining jobs for individuals with records.
- 3) Influence key employers interested in hiring people with records to reform internal hiring and onboarding processes to specifically support the needs of returning individuals.
 - a. Understand in detail the common challenges faced by returning individuals in the job search, application, and onboarding processes.
 - b. Partner with a cohort of committed employers to codify common internal challenges faced by companies when creating specific initiatives for individuals with records, and best practices for improving company processes such that individuals with records can succeed.
 - c. Craft and launch targeted, employer-to-employer, peer campaigns to educate each other and support implementation of best-in-class practices.

- 4) Explore potential for bringing the Prison Industry Enhancement Certification Program (PIECP) to Illinois, so that the prevailing wage for employment during incarceration is improved.
 - a. Develop a comprehensive fact base on PIECP, including perspectives from incarcerated individuals on improving work programs, to inform if advocacy for PIECP should be prioritized in the near-term.
 - b. If PIECP is a prioritized near-term effort, pre-emptively identify employers who would be interested in using PIECP to create roles within DOC facilities.
 - c. Then, craft targeted advocacy campaign to enroll critical private and public stakeholders who are well-positioned to champion PIECP implementation.
- 5) Increase access to relevant asset-based post-secondary education programs inside of the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) and local jail facilities.
 - a. Engage accredited education institutions (public and private 2-year and 4-year schools, trade schools, etc.), employers, foundations, financial experts (i.e., banks, community development financial institutions, foundations), community-based organizations, families, friends, and services networks to develop workforce and academic programs useful for people who will be exiting jails and prisons.
 - b. Further engage those partners to develop seamless continuation of that programming in communities.
- 6) Support the recommendations of the Higher Education in Prison Task Force and ensure that adult technical and post-secondary education credentials from IDOC and local jail programs are transferable to accredited institutions and recognized by industries.
 - a. Ensure that those institutions are equipped to support the success of people leaving incarceration.
- 7) Support communications and connections between education institutions—especially those operating within prisons and jails—and employers to develop programming that meets interests of currently incarcerated individuals, fosters job placements, and ensures that the material being taught qualifies an individual to work within the related industry or job.
- 8) Support entrepreneurial initiatives and programs, with a focus on those founded or led by individuals with records.
- 9) Support and engage in work being done to provide living wages to those who are incarcerated and have been incarcerated.
- 10) Develop a strategy for effectively utilizing PELL dollars when they become available again in June 2023.
- 11) Catalog current state, county and city spending on reentry employment and education services and supports to assess where additional resources are needed.

Public Agencies’ Practices, Policies and Programming (Co-Chairs: Reality Richard Lovett – READI, Heartland Alliance; Jennifer Parrack – Illinois Department of Corrections; Nneka Jones Tapia – Chicago Beyond)

- 1) Adopt and implement an asset-based and trauma-informed approach (models and practices) to support people entering and exiting prisons and jails that includes staff at facilities.
 - a. Incorporate humanizing, identity-recognizing, and people-centered language.
- 2) Implement policies and practices that prioritize and support people in custody to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships with families, support networks and community-based organizations in the communities to which they will return.
 - a. Identify and adopt policies and practices for visitation, telephone, and family-organized events that are uniform across facilities.

- b. Develop metrics that allow these policies and practices to be evaluated.
- 3) Reform or eliminate Mandatory Supervised Release (MSR) as conditions of compliance with MSR can create obstacles to securing housing and employment, and to [re-] establishing healthy connections in the community.
 - a. Create a subgroup that regularly reports into the workgroup on discussions, learnings and progress on this recommendation.
- 4) Engage with various state, county, and city departments, boards, and agencies to (1) inform and educate leadership and staff on reentry and current landscape; (2) identify policies, practices, and programs that can be developed or amended to better serve individuals reentering communities; (3) identify gaps and barriers within their services and programming to broaden access; (4) facilitate effective communication and information sharing among departments and agencies. Such departments and agencies include but are not limited to:
 - a. Department on Aging (IDOA):
 - i. Develop educational materials and opportunities for service providers to better understand the context of reentry and experiences of older adults reentering.
 - b. Secretary of State (SOS):
 - i. Monitor, support the implementation of, and assist in developing solutions to barriers of the state ID program that the Secretary of State facilitates in partnership with IDOC.
 - c. Healthcare and Family Services (IDHFS):
 - i. Monitor and support the implementation of Medicaid enrollment within IDOC, Cook County Jail, and other jails.
 - d. Department of Public Health (IDPH):
 - i. Address barriers to accessing nursing homes faced by people with records, especially as it relates to finding placements for individuals leaving IDOC under the Joe Coleman Medical Release Act.
 - e. Department of Human Services (IDHS):
 - i. Support and monitor their work with IDOC on enrollment in SNAP, vocational training for people with disabilities, and determining Medicaid eligibility on behalf of IDHFS.
 - ii. Establish a position with responsibilities and authority over reentry in DHS.
 - f. Department of Financial and Professional Regulation (IDFPR)
 - i. Monitor and support the elimination of barriers to accessing occupational licensing; and identify and eliminate discriminatory practices of insurance and background check companies which create obstacles to employment.
 - g. Prisoner Review Board (PRB)
 - i. Explore whether the Parole Division of IDOC and PRB are playing productive roles in helping individuals secure education and find and maintain employment.

- 5) Monitor and support engagement of public agencies in activities of other workgroups that relate to workgroup topics (Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Illinois Housing Development Authority, etc.).
- 6) Support and monitor implementation of the [Joe Coleman Medical Release Act \(JCMR\)](#) across the Prisoner Review Board and IDOC, as well as agencies that can be engaged in implementation, such as IDPH.

Special Considerations Populations (Co-Chairs: Willette Benford – Office of the Mayor of Chicago; Colette Payne – Women’s Justice Institute; Alyssa Williams – Illinois Department of Corrections)

Members identified the following populations as priorities in addressing special considerations through the development of policies and practices:

- LGBTQIA2S+ & gender-nonconforming individuals;
 - Aging and elderly individuals;
 - Seriously mentally ill and those with substance use disorder and other disabilities;
 - People subject to state banishment laws;
 - Women;
 - Individuals with children/other dependents;
 - Individuals who are undocumented;
 - Veterans;
 - Individuals with various medical conditions; Youth;
 - Emerging adults;
 - Individuals with experience with the child welfare system;
 - People who have served/are serving long and extremely long sentences (20 years+);
 - Survivors of domestic violence; and
 - People listed on public conviction registries
- 1) Collaborate and advise other workgroups to ensure that housing, support services, and economic opportunities are equitably accessible to individuals with special considerations – especially those with high needs – and focus on long-term solutions to the barriers they face. This collaboration will be created by providing guidance to and attending the meetings of the Housing, Support Services, and Economic Opportunity and Upward Mobility workgroups. This workgroup will also work with organizations who have well-rounded understandings of the experiences of people in particular special considerations groups (e.g., the Task Force of Children with Incarcerated Parents and Children’s Best Interest Project).
 - 2) Determine what currently incarcerated individuals' needs, interests, and concerns are prior to their release and integrate their responses in the IRC’s work, especially directed to the appropriate workgroup.
 - a. Develop and distribute a survey within IDOC that captures this feedback from individuals with the identities specifically outlined in each group.
 - b. Design educational materials and learning opportunities for Council members and interested external partners centered on characteristics and populations of focus (such as gender-responsive programming, service delivery, etc.). Identify and engage

subject matter experts (impacted individuals, organizations, etc.) to co-design and develop such materials and learning opportunities.

- 3) Refine the list of policy and practice changes for each consideration listed and identify prioritization for the workgroup to adhere to.

Financing for Reentry (Co-Chairs: Mark Angelini – Mercy Housing; Michael Goldberg – IFF; Floyd Stafford – Steans Family Foundation)

- 1) Identify and influence the flow of new and existing resources to support effective and promising approaches that help people with records successfully reintegrate into society. Then monitor, track, and evaluate the effectiveness of these resources.
- 2) To support initiatives advanced by the other workgroups, identify, and pursue funding sources by developing a list of promising programs and initiatives that can be replicated or started across Illinois.
 - a. In conjunction with the Housing Workgroup, identify and pursue sources of funding for housing acquisition, rehab, and development (i.e., Real Estate Transfer Tax, R3 Funding, filing fees, etc.) to expand the supply of reentry housing available.
 - b. Assist the General Assembly and Governor in reallocating the savings from consolidating prisons and juvenile facilities to support reentry.
- 3) In the short term, in partnership with the Housing workgroup, influence American Rescue Plan Act spending so it funds the expansion of reentry housing supply with intentional support to organizations that provide services to people with records.
- 4) Explore Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) funding to support the work of the Economic Opportunities and Upward Mobility workgroup.

Housing (Co-Chairs: Gianna Baker – Chicago Area Fair Housing Alliance; Richard Rowe – Corporation for Supportive Housing; Alan Zais – Northern Illinois Regional Affordable Community Housing)

- 1) Collect data about housing and support needs of all individuals leaving incarceration (*in partnership with Support Services working group*).
 - a. Review and modify the existing Housing Discharge Planning Assessment, to ensure this tool appropriately allows jails and prisons to identify the housing needs of people in custody, prior to release.
 - b. Partner with IDOC to invest in the infrastructure (e.g., tablets, data integration) and people training (both IDOC staff and people preparing to exit) required to successfully drive usage of this tool at scale.
 - c. Build a comprehensive report on the scale of housing needed as well as the types of services required to effectively support individuals exiting incarceration.
- 2) Establish a clear vision and align political support for a housing continuum that will effectively bring the supply of reentry housing and support services to a level that fully addresses the spectrum of housing needs of people with records.
 - a. Outline the housing continuum, including the types of housing and associated services required, as well as a clear rationale for why each type is needed to serve people with records.

- b. Identify and develop targeted advocacy campaigns towards certain critical stakeholders (public and private) well positioned to champion and support the development of this continuum.
- 3) Influence and incentivize landlords / owners of affordable housing to increase access to people with records.
 - a. Develop a detailed understanding of landlords / owners and their current rental practices (e.g., why they don't rent to this population today, what misconceptions exist, which forums can landlords be reached through at scale).
 - b. Codify a "Reentry Housing Messaging Toolkit", which strives to address the most common hesitations and misconceptions they have and builds awareness to the most effective tools and levers (e.g., incentives) available to landlords today.
 - c. Assess the landscape of existing fair housing protections and enforcement; identify mechanisms to expand protections via increased enforcement and / or expanded legislation.
 - d. Assess the effectiveness of existing landlord incentives and develop new incentives that address gaps and are more effective at driving landlord action.
- 4) Influence recipients of government funding (i.e., housing service providers) to remove criteria that are limiting to people impacted by the criminal legal system.
 - a. Develop a comprehensive fact base of the various sources of funding for each type of housing along the continuum, including a detailed understanding of funding allocation processes and restrictive criteria, to better understand where there is the greatest opportunity to improve access for people returning from prisons and jails.
 - b. Craft unique, targeted campaigns to advocate for funding that is more inclusive to people returning from prisons and jails, prioritizing those funders controlling the greatest share of housing currently in need.
- 5) Create a detailed "Opportunity Development Playbook" that can guide less experienced individuals (*particularly those who are previously incarcerated themselves*) and service providers in effectively navigating the process of creating / rehabilitating affordable housing.
 - a. Gather feedback from those less-experienced developers who have recently gone through the development process, to understand the primary challenges they faced and where additional guidance would have been most helpful.
 - b. Collect and synthesize existing guidance on navigating the development process, from agencies and organizations currently providing similar support to other audiences.
 - c. Develop communication strategies to identify and share the playbook broadly.
- 6) Identify affordable housing properties at highest risk of converting to market-rate and develop tailored strategies to ensure properties remain affordable.
 - a. Leverage publicly available data to understand which buildings are soon to be losing their Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) benefits, as these are properties most likely to convert to market-rate.
 - b. Develop additional methodologies to prioritize amongst these buildings (e.g., # of units, average income levels, etc.) and identify a manageable subset of properties to seek to maintain as affordable.
 - c. Develop targeted strategies specific to each property that can support units remaining affordable (e.g., aligning additional financial support, building community advocacy, identifying additional tenants).
- 7) Implement a centralized reentry housing database which captures the existing supply of accessible housing and programmatically supports more efficient matching of returning individuals with landlords who have previously indicated openness to housing people with criminal records.

- a. Understand previous and current efforts to establish a centralized reentry housing database within IL / Chicago, as well as potential partners (e.g., Housing Connector, Google Housing Portal).
 - b. Align on critical requirements of database and identify potential technical partners capable of supporting the development of this technology.
 - c. Enroll groups of landlords interested in participating in such a database, as their buy-in will be critical to maintaining an effective system.
- 8) Monitor the implementation of state and local fair housing reforms (e.g., Cook County Just Housing Ordinance, the reentry housing amendment to the Illinois Human Rights Act) and determine whether additional changes to the text or implementation of these laws are necessary, or whether new laws are necessary.
- 9) In conjunction with the Special Considerations Population workgroup, advocate for reforms to housing banishment laws (restrictions to live 500 feet from a school, park, day care) that apply to individuals on public registries.

Support Services (Co-Chairs: Delrice Adams – Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority; Orlando Mayorga – Justice, Equity and Opportunity Initiative, Lt. Governor’s Office)

- 1) Create a coordinated network of localized supports and services that is readily accessible to formerly incarcerated individuals and their families whether immediately upon release or later during one’s reentry.
- a. Collaboratively develop, maintain, and share a database of reentry programs, services, and related information easily available in Illinois that is widely accessible, including programs and services that are available to people, with an emphasis on voluntary services that are reflective of both needs and individuals’ personal goals.
 - b. Build capacity of community-based organizations that support individuals reentering in holistic, trauma-informed, and gender-responsive ways and through a solidarity approach.
 - c. Collaborate with IDOC Northern and Southern Reentry Managers on in-reach and connection to resources before leaving incarceration.
 - d. Engage individuals who have received supports and services as well as organizations which serve individuals reentering to identify and routinely update provided services based on challenges and successes experienced across the state.
 - i. Regionally convene groups of organizations and individuals to foster collaboration in a hub format. This hub format would include a central state-level stakeholder responsible for convening regions throughout Illinois, helping to coordinate their work, and providing any financial and legislative resources needed. These regions would be made up by government, non-profit, and community-based entities working together to provide supports and services according to the specific needs of each region.
- 2) Strengthen and construct permanent networks of social support for people reentering and their families, emphasizing methods of peer-support such as cohorts of individuals returning to the same community, connected both through community-based organizations or as individuals.
- 3) Prioritize physical and mental health services and social-emotional wellness support that is healing-centered and trauma-informed for individuals reentering.

- 4) Support and expand efforts to remove permanent punishments, monitor the effectiveness of those efforts in reducing the barriers individuals face across housing, employment, and other facets of reentry, and navigate permanent punishments while they exist. Then, use this information to strengthen the network of supports and services.

Conclusion

This plan is the product of the work of the members of the Illinois Reentry Council and includes their priorities and goals. As the Council members work together over the next several years to implement the priorities outlined here, they may decide to modify them or to delete or add other goals, depending on the evolution of this work. As opportunities arise, the Council will take advantage of them and move swiftly to move certain priorities forward. Some obstacles may be harder than others to overcome. For that reason, the members and staff will remain vigilant and persistent in implementation, waiting for values and circumstances to change in order to find the right times to advance priorities. Progress has already been made in areas listed in the strategic plan and the foundation has been laid for progress for many. The Annual Report in each of the coming years will document the accomplishments and changes needed in the strategic plan. Through this process, the Council envisions the creation of a vibrant, well-funded, accessible, humane and equitable support system for all people who have been incarcerated in Illinois.

Appendix 6: Workgroup Charges

The Illinois Reentry Council is made up of the six Workgroups:

Workgroup 1: Economic Opportunity and Upward Mobility

- Co-Chairs: Michael Cannon (Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership); Matthew McFarland (Lawndale Christian Legal Center)

This workgroup will support the creation of pathways to economic opportunity and upward mobility prior to and post release, including those provided by employment and education. The workgroup will develop strategies to increase access to training and employment, develop incentives to increase the number of employers willing to hire people with criminal records, engage employers to provide individuals with quality, family-sustaining jobs, and examine current policies that make it difficult for individuals who have a criminal record to find employment and develop ways to address these barriers. The workgroup will also review the barriers employers face when hiring people with records and address those barriers. In addition to the pathways created by employment, this group will work to increase access to education programs, both inside and outside of the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) and jail facilities, support entrepreneurial initiatives and programs, and explore other nontraditional means to achieving economic opportunity and upward mobility.

Workgroup 2: Public Agencies' Practices, Policies and Programming

- Co-Chairs: Reality Richard Lovett (READI, Heartland Alliance); Jennifer Parrack (Illinois Department of Corrections); Nneka Jones Tapia (Chicago Beyond)

This workgroup will examine the practices, policies and programming of government agencies to determine whether they support returning residents. This includes examining

current IDOC pre-release activities, policies and the risks/needs classification process, and aiding in the implementation of improvements to facilitate a more successful reentry process. The group will implement policies and practices that prioritize and support people in custody to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships with families, support networks, and community-based organizations in the communities to which they will return. Additionally, this group will examine the policies, practices, programming and potential for other state agencies, such as the Department of Healthcare and Family Services, the Department of Financial and Professional Regulation and the Department of Human Services, to support those reentering and collaborate.

Workgroup 3: **Special Considerations**

- Co-Chairs: Willette Benford (Chicago Mayor's Office, Office of Reentry); Colette Payne (Women's Justice Institute); Alyssa Williams (Illinois Department of Corrections)

The Special Considerations Workgroup will research and develop policy recommendations that will address the unique needs of and identify best practices for individuals who are members of specific populations, such as women and gender non-conforming individuals, those that are elderly, those with serious mental illness (SMI), individuals with children, individuals who are undocumented, and people with sex offense convictions. There will be an emphasis on determining what currently incarcerated individuals' needs, interests and concerns are prior to their release and connecting them with support services that appropriately address their feedback.

Workgroup 4: **Financing for Reentry**

- Co-Chairs: Mark Angelini (Mercy Housing); Michael Goldberg (IFF); Floyd Stafford (Steans Family Foundation)

The Financing Reentry Workgroup will identify funding opportunities and areas of investment to develop and support a strong statewide reentry system. The group will identify a list of issues that have the highest funding needs and develop ways they can be addressed. This will include having the workgroup partner with relevant stakeholders and local community organizations to identify innovative funding opportunities, such as private and government grants, and permanent public revenue streams. Recommendations and issues concerning financing developed in other work groups are fed here to ensure that support for other Workgroup funding priorities will be addressed.

Workgroup 5: **Housing**

- Co-Chairs: Gianna Baker (Chicago Area Fair Housing Alliance); Richard Rowe (Corporation for Supportive Housing); Alan Zais (Northern Illinois Regional Affordable Community Housing)

The Housing Workgroup will identify ways to promote housing access for returning individuals. They will do so by examining the housing and support needs of individuals preparing to exit incarceration, influencing and incentivizing landlords, recipients of government funding and owners of affordable housing to increase access to people with records, and implementing a reentry housing database that captures the existing supply of accessible housing. This workgroup will also monitor the implementation of state and local fair housing reforms, such as the Cook County Just Housing Ordinance and the reentry

housing amendment to the Illinois Human Rights Act, and determine whether additional changes to the text or implementation of these laws are necessary.

Workgroup 6: **Support Services**

- Co-Chairs: Delrice Adams (Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority); Orlando Mayorga (Justice, Equity and Opportunity Initiative, Lt. Governor's Office)

The Support Services Workgroup will focus on developing and maintaining a framework of statewide tools that will be used to connect returning individuals with a variety of support services to help them successfully reenter society. These services will include assisting them with finding housing, employment, and educational opportunities. The group will examine how to improve the coordination of these services by working with local community organizations who can deliver and provide these support services. In addition, the group will focus on creating a system that identifies the specific needs of each returning individual and matches them with the appropriate support services required. These needs should be determined by objective and validated standards that are also cognizant of each returning community member's needs, particularly if they are a member of a special consideration group. The group will also support and expand efforts to remove permanent punishments and assist individuals in navigating permanent punishments while they still exist and monitor the effectiveness of those efforts in reducing barriers.

Appendix 7: Reentry Pilot Summary Report

From: Illinois Justice Project

Re: Reentry Housing Demonstration Program

Date: Tuesday, November 29, 2022

Introduction

This memo serves to provide an update on the Illinois Justice Project Reentry Housing Demonstration Program. Since launching in August 2020, the pilot has served 54 people. The Illinois Justice Project (ILJP) has contracted the operational services of Safer Foundation and TASC (Treatment Alternatives for Safer Communities), who have worked independently with funding and support from ILJP. Safer and TASC focus on support through apartment rent subsidies, and connecting clients to wraparound support services.

The goal of the pilot is to help identify what programmatic design is necessary to support people leaving incarceration in state prisons successfully reenter their communities. The design anticipated providing support for housing, employment, desired personal services such as health care and access to food.

About 75% of the clients served by the pilot were employed as of July 2022, including past and current participants. Many people are now enrolled in Medicaid and SNAP benefits prior to release, through a Department of Health Services initiative. All 30 of Safer's clients who were not enrolled pre-release were able to be enrolled in SNAP and Medicaid once in the program. All but 3 of TASC's 24 clients are enrolled in SNAP – 2 did not meet qualifications and 1 refused to reapply after claiming

he did not meet qualifications. All but 1 TASC client are enrolled in Medicaid. 12 of TASC's 23 clients receive behavioral health services, and 9 clients receive mental health services. Of Safer's 35 clients, 6 had a physical need, 1 had a cognitive need, 7 had a mental health need, and 8 had a need for services for substance use disorder. 8 received mental health services, and 8 signed up for substance use services. Program participants report saving money as they adjust to life after incarceration.

Both providers employ caseworkers to support their clients. TASC's caseworkers operate as reentry navigators who help manage the client's transition by connecting them with housing and support services. Safer employs housing navigators to manage the client's housing transition specifically, and reentry navigators to support the client in accessing support services and transitioning into a changed society. The role of reentry navigators is emerging as a crucial element of successful reentry.

Housing Operations

The main financial support mechanism of the pilot is direct rental subsidies that allow clients to accumulate savings before transitioning to fully autonomous financial management. TASC, working outside Cook County, was able to connect with landlords offering rooms for lease. Safer, working within Cook County, utilized master leases (agreements with landlords to keep rooms reserved for Safer clients) and purchased a building to house participants. Safer's rental unit subsidies encompass 13 Single Room Occupancy units (SROs) and Studio apartments, and 2 one- and two-bedroom apartments. Over all 25 units, Safer's average monthly cost is \$750. TASC spends an average of \$670 per month across all unit types. Broken down by type, Safer pays a monthly average of \$900 for one-bedroom units and \$650 for SROs and studio apartments. TASC had one outlier of \$1400 rent, but they assume that is due to the client's sex offense conviction. In addition to rental units, TASC has supported the mortgage payments of 2-3 clients, as the clients returned to the homes they resided in prior to their incarceration. With the exception of 4 Safer Foundation clients, all rental leases acquired through the pilot have been for a duration of 12 months. Safer and TASC offer rental support for up to 12 months, though the average client uses support for 8.5 to 9 months, respectively. TASC clients ease into rent responsibility, as they assume responsibility for half of the rent during their final month in the program, while TASC pays the other half.

Regarding relationships with landlords, both providers note apprehension from landlords and property managers around renting to returning residents. TASC observed particular resistance to tenants with felony convictions. Both providers experienced low awareness of the Just Housing Amendment (the Cook County ordinance prohibiting housing discrimination based on criminal backgrounds) and the Illinois Human Rights Act (protecting against discrimination in real estate transactions due to a criminal record). When the program was initially designed to pay six months of rent, landlords were concerned about the economic stability of the clients after the end of the program. The extension of the subsidy from 6 to 12 months was crucial to increasing landlord and property manager confidence in the program and its clients. Case managers also improved landlord confidence in their tenants' reliability. Both Safer and TASC have connected with landlords who offered to continue housing returning residents. TASC had two landlords express interest in housing returning residents, regardless of subsidy, after positive experiences with program participants. Though the majority of program clients have not received complaints, TASC had one landlord invoke a Crime-Free ordinance¹ to evict a client. They also had a landlord fail to respond to bedbug complaints within the unit, and another who turned out to be the client's girlfriend masquerading as a landlord to get cash without the client acquiring their own unit.

Wraparound Support Services

The pilot anticipated that providers would need to provide wraparound support services to their clients but were given discretion as to what services they provided and how.

Safer provides clients cell phones (thanks to a donation from AT&T), financial support for utility bills and other housing-related costs (application fees, appliance maintenance, etc.), as well as rental application supports, and resource assistance in furnishing their homes. They guide clients on establishing an “emergency fund” through programming and financial literacy courses. Safer also connects clients to community support systems like community pantries, furniture banks, and support groups.

TASC has provided services directly to clients and has taken a role in behind-the-scenes advocacy. TASC’s direct services for clients include system navigation support for Medicaid, SNAP, and behavioral health access. In addition to securing housing, they work with clients on housing stabilization education, which includes developing budgets to sustain housing and long-term housing and employment goals. TASC has also organized support and educational groups for clients to discuss the challenges associated with reentry and recovery, as well as housing. They direct clients to technology assistance, with a focus on ensuring client access to telehealth services when needed. Their work to connect clients with community supports has included a statewide resource directory for services like job training, substance abuse disorder treatment, food pantries, furniture banks, and clothing sources. In an effort to increase the sustainable impact of this pilot, TASC is building a network of landlords open to housing returning residents. They market strategically to increase landlord interest, address housing barriers that violate client rights, and work to prevent landlord misinterpretations of protective ordinances, policies, or laws.

Transition and impact

Safer and TASC are currently providing services to clients for an average of 9 and 8.5 months, respectively. Clients with medical, employment, or serious financial issues may remain longer than average for TASC. The transition process for both providers includes check-ins on personal goals and financial stability. After transitioning out of the rental subsidy program, clients of both Safer and TASC can continue to utilize their reentry navigators and other program supports at any point in their future journey.

Safer monitors clients’ preparedness to transition out of the program through an individualized service plan, which includes both financial and housing stability components. While participating in the rental subsidy program, clients meet monthly with reentry navigators to review progress towards goals. This allows the reentry navigator to reassess what resources are available for the client and to add new goals to the plan. Safer reentry navigators remain in contact with clients for a minimum of 3 months after the client’s rental subsidies have ended.

Similarly, TASC clients meet with reentry navigators to discuss transition plans and budgetary goals before exiting the program. The client often initiates this process, sharing that they believe they are prepared to assume full responsibility for their rental fees. During the final month, when TASC and the client split rent responsibility, TASC reevaluates which additional wraparound services may benefit the client and ensures their ongoing access to those services.