



Strategic Plan

October 9, 2025

The Illinois Reentry Council is a body composed of over two hundred people across 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 strives to influence the policies and practices listed in this strategic plan that impact the lives of returning residents. The Council's co-chairs include Executive Director Delrice Adams (IL Criminal Justice Information Authority), Alderman Walter Burnett (Retired, Chicago City Council), Executive Director Marlon Chamberlain (Coalition to End Permanent Punishments), Director Yaacov Delaney (JEO Initiative, Lt. Gov.'s Office), Chair King Harris (IL Housing Development Authority), and Director Latoya Hughes (IL Department of Corrections). These individuals offer leadership with the Council members to implement the priorities for action and execute the Council's goals.

Members include people who have been incarcerated, people elected and appointed to government positions with authority to change the operation of existing systems, advocates, people representing advocacy member associations, local elected officials, service providers, researchers, and people 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 provide 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 has change been 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 supports through cultural, narrative, and structural changes.

This plan provides a framework for implementation of a strengthened network of reentry policies and practices. This plan reflects ongoing 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 asset-based and trauma-informed policies and practices to circumvent or eliminate those obstacles.
- Identify other common challenges people face in reentry and collaborate to eliminate those barriers.
- Review information and learn from stakeholders about various aspects of reentry in Illinois and reentry resources in other jurisdictions that may offer effective ideas applicable to Illinois.

- Devise and oversee implementation of policies and practices which will permit all people to successfully reenter communities from incarceration.
- Equip IRC members with the knowledge and skills needed to advocate and take action for improved reentry in Illinois.
- Educate other key stakeholders to humanize the reentry narrative and build a stronger understanding of the realities of reentry in Illinois.
- Create and oversee this strategic plan to guide the Council's work, including an annual review to evaluate its progress.
- Create a forum where people, community organizations, and public agencies interested in strengthening reentry processes and support can meet one another and share information about their goals and methods for achieving the goals.

The Council includes five workgroups which:

- Define specific elements of reentry to be addressed in the workgroup, incorporate those in the strategic plan, and support implementation of the policies and practices which are included 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.

Goals and objectives of workgroups:

Economic Opportunity and Upward Mobility Workgroup (Co-Chairs: Michael Cannon – Got Jobs America; Melissa O'Dell – Defy Ventures Illinois; Angel Pantoja – JEO Initiative, Lt. Gov.'s Office)

Economic opportunities have historically been limited for returning residents. Higher education in prison programs shuttered following the 1996 Crime Bill. Employers screened out people with records, regardless of the record's relevance to the open position. Funding for existing workforce programs incentivize a programming structure that is not conducive to supporting people with records. Approximately half of people who left IDOC were unemployed for their first 3 years after release. Since the creation of the Illinois Reentry Council, and after identifying their initial Strategic Plan goals in 2022, the Economic Opportunity and Upward Mobility Workgroup has identified what people need prior to and after release to achieve economic autonomy. Efforts have been focused on building partnerships that effectively collaborate to best support people with records. These include partnerships across relevant state agencies (connecting the Department of Corrections' Reentry Office (est. 2020) to the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity's workforce resources), between higher education institutions and state prisons, and between employers who want to hire and support people with records. Formerly incarcerated people are guiding the work as leaders of community workforce agencies, as connectors between community and government, and as experts who have navigated these systems themselves.

The goals below will create economic opportunities for returning residents by consolidating available workforce supports, educating people to re-enter the workforce, and increasing the jobs available for people with records. Reducing the stigma of a record and encouraging employers to reduce hiring barriers for people with records will open job opportunities in new sectors for returning residents. Engaging public agencies and community organizations who provide workforce development programming will make these resources more targeted to what people need and useful for the jobs available. Access to higher education will allow returning residents to grow beyond typical opportunities, receive a living wage, and become upwardly mobile. Reducing barriers like licensing fees will allow people with records to work in areas they

have training in and a passion for. The leadership of formerly incarcerated people and organizations led by formerly incarcerated people will improve the impact and coordination of this workforce system.

- 1) Develop and implement regional strategies among Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) and Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) to significantly increase access to training and employment resources.
 - a. Assess existing capacity and impact of IDOC and DCEO reentry workforce programming.
 - i. Document the number of individuals in IDOC custody engaged in employment programming and identify the type of programming.
 - ii. Analyze employment outcomes for formerly incarcerated individuals who receive support from American Jobs Centers and Local Workforce Areas.
 - iii. Understand the model of reentry job placements and the outcomes provided by Adult Transition Center job coordinators.
 - b. Leverage knowledge of DCEO regional managers and IDOC reentry coordinators to create and codify localized strategies that will include:
 - i. Support intense engagement of local workforce boards and Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) to increase access to staff and resources within IDOC facilities.
 - ii. Assess potential partners to bring employer-led direct training to IDOC facilities.
 - iii. Identify potential IDOC facilities and employer partners that are well-positioned to pilot day-release programs (likely limited in scale).
 - c. Make DCEO workforce system information available to IDOC parole officers to increase access to post-release employment resources.
 - d. Engage DCEO's Employment Division with the reentry population.
 - e. Develop strategies and processes to smoothly transition people in custody from the local workforce area resources available where they are incarcerated to the workforce area resources in the community they return to.
- 2) Develop a comprehensive vision and practical design for reentry workforce development programming, to support returning residents acquiring family-sustaining, stable employment.
 - a. Conduct Reentry Program Landscape Analysis: Perform a detailed study of existing reentry and workforce development programs, identifying their scope, target populations, and effectiveness and develop a visual representation of this landscape.
 - b. In partnership with DCEO and IDES, align private workforce development centers with LWA's and American Job Centers.
 - c. Incorporate Employment Social Enterprises as a meaningful strategy to provide the first post-release employment.
 - d. Increase the availability and capacity of navigators who support individuals to evaluate and assist in obtaining their workforce options.
 - e. Incorporate educational institutions into programming, both inside and outside carceral settings.
- 3) Catalog current state, county and city spending on reentry employment and education services and supports to assess where additional resources are needed (*in partnership with the Financing for Reentry Workgroup*)
- 4) Continue educating employers in high-potential industries on fair chance hiring, and support employers committed to reforming internal hiring and onboarding processes to support the needs of formerly incarcerated job applicants and employees.
 - a. Design and launch targeted campaigns to enroll employers who will create quality, family-sustaining jobs for individuals with records.
 - i. Use the detailed understanding of current employer perspectives on hiring individuals with records, including common misconceptions and concerns, in these campaigns.

- ii. Craft materials for employers to launch peer-to-peer campaigns for educating others about and implementing best practices around Fair Chance Hiring.
 - iii. Gather data on the effectiveness of these campaigns in creating fair chance jobs.
 - b. Using information gleaned from the campaign to enroll employers to create a detailed “employer messaging toolkit” to build awareness on challenges faced by individuals with records, address common employer hesitations and challenges, inform on incentives / tools available to employers, and share best practices for improving company processes so that people with records can succeed
 - c. Encourage employers to align job opportunities, apprenticeships, and training programs with the needs and strengths of the reentry community
 - i. Organize regular meetings and workshops to facilitate knowledge sharing and program alignment between businesses, workforce agencies, and reentry support organizations.
- 5) Monitor and support the elimination of barriers to accessing occupational licensing.
- 6) Identify and eliminate discriminatory practices of insurance and background check companies which create obstacles to employment.
- 7) Develop a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder approach to create education opportunities for justice-involved individuals, spanning from incarceration through reentry and beyond, ensuring accessible, industry-relevant programming that maximizes available resources and fosters long-term success.
 - a. Sustainably expand pre-release educational programming beyond Adult Basic Education (ABE) and General Educational Development (GED) programming in include both more advanced educational options and technical training that leads immediately to employment.
 - b. Increase access to relevant asset-based post-secondary education programs inside of the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) and local jail facilities.
 - i. 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.
 - ii. Further engage those partners to develop seamless continuation of that programming in communities.
 - c. 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.
 - i. Ensure that those institutions have effective community connections to support the success of people leaving incarceration.
 - ii. Build comprehensive education programming that ensures that the programming is accessible to everyone regardless of their sentence length.
 - d. 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.
 - i. Develop a comprehensive program that equips career offices at educational institutions with knowledge and resources to support justice-involved students.
 - e. Develop suggestions for how to streamline the Pell eligibility process, since its relaunch in 2023, to support more universities in offering prison education programming.
 - f. Develop a process including the Illinois State Board of Education, the Illinois Board of Higher Education, the Illinois Department of Corrections and other state agencies to report annually on the success of the education and training programs and the needs of employers and also those seeking employment who have criminal backgrounds.

- 8) Support entrepreneurial initiatives and programs, with a focus on those founded or led by individuals with records.
- 9) Implement a comprehensive financial literacy program for individuals in IDOC custody, ensuring they acquire essential money management skills and technological competencies before release. The goal is to equip returning residents with the knowledge and tools necessary to navigate modern financial systems, make informed economic decisions, and achieve financial stability in an increasingly digital world.
- 10) Develop an understanding of existing digital literacy resources for returning residents and individuals in custody, and identify resources necessary to expand provision of digital literacy resources (*in partnership with the Financing for Reentry workgroup*)
- 11) Support and engage in work being done to provide living wages to those who are incarcerated and have been incarcerated.
- 12) Understand the fines and fees that inhibit the upward mobility of returning residents and work to mitigate or remove those permanent punishments (i.e., backpay on social services or child support, registry fees)

Financing for Reentry Workgroup (Co-Chairs: Mark Angelini – Mercy Housing Lakefront; Michael Goldberg – Illinois Facilities Fund; Floyd Stafford – Coalition to End Permanent Punishments)

Through the work of advocates, people who have been incarcerated, researchers, and others, Illinois has realized that investing in reentry leads to more successful outcomes, and public and private entities have begun to make those investments. Public funding for reentry programs has increased sharply over the last decade. In addition to reentry funding from the Illinois Department of Corrections, and reentry funding from the federal Department of Justice, Illinois now invests in reentry through the Restore, Reinvest, Renew (R3) program. Cook County and the City of Chicago have established reentry line items as well. Since the creation of the Illinois Reentry Council, and after identifying their initial Strategic Plan goals in 2022, the Financing Workgroup analyzed the resources currently dedicated to reentry and explored how to support initiatives developed by the Council. This workgroup played a role in successfully influencing American Rescue Plan Act spending to fund the expansion of reentry housing supply. This workgroup has also developed relationships within the Governor’s Office on Management and Budget to get an annual review of line items in the Illinois State Budget that are allocated towards reentry.

The below goals summarize efforts to fiscally support effective and promising approaches to reintegrating individuals from incarceration. In order to do so, this workgroup will identify possible sources of funding for initiatives created in other workgroups. In addition to finding long-term funding opportunities for reentry programs, the goals encourage following short-term funding opportunities that allow for innovation.

- 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 to guide best practices around resource allocation.
 - a. Conduct a comprehensive assessment and develop a database of current public funding sources and programs supporting reintegration efforts, particularly IDOC transitional housing funds.
 - b. Implement a robust monitoring and tracking system to:
 - i. Collect data on resource utilization, i.e., how these funds are used.
 - ii. Measure outcomes of funded programs/resources.
 - iii. Identify trends and patterns in resource effectiveness.

- 2) To support initiatives advanced by other IRC workgroups, identify and pursue funding sources by developing a list of promising programs and initiatives that can be replicated or started across Illinois.
 - a. 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 (*in partnership with the Housing Workgroup*).
 - b. Explore Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) funding and grants provided by the US Department of Labor (*in partnership with the Economic Opportunity and Upward Mobility Workgroup*).
 - c. Conduct an annual review of publicly funded community-based reentry programs to identify promising models and promote transparency and collaboration.
- 3) Actively track and capitalize on diverse funding streams, including the Medicaid 1115 waiver and one-time special funding opportunities like the American Rescue Act, to support and enhance reentry programs. Encourage strategic allocation of resources to build robust, sustainable reentry programs while maximizing the impact of available funding.
 - a. Track the impact of American Rescue Plan Act spending on reentry housing supply (*in partnership with the Housing Workgroup*)
 - b. Support the implementation of the Medicaid 1115 Waiver permitting Medicaid coverage for reentry resources (*in partnership with the Support Services Workgroup*)

Support Services Workgroup (Co-Chairs: Quiwana Bell – Illinois Department of Human Services; Millicent Lewis-McCoy – Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority; Orlando Mayorga – Polk Brothers Foundation; Jennifer Parrack – Illinois Department of Corrections)

Formerly incarcerated people have raised awareness of the barriers that people with records face to accessing social services. Returning residents' access to public benefits like SNAP and Medicaid has improved through coordinated efforts between state agencies. However, funding continues to create programs that lack equitable services for people with records. Since the creation of the Illinois Reentry Council, and after identifying their initial Strategic Plan goals in 2022, the Support Services workgroup members have identified successful service models and worked to connect reentry service providers for a more connected support system. The workgroup ideated a statewide conference for reentry service providers, which occurred in November 2024 in Bloomington, bringing service providers to identify gaps, strengths, and build collaboration. The workgroup has also prioritized outreach and has introduced many new reentry stakeholders to the Council. More accomplishments related to the Support Services Workgroup can be found in the 2022, 2023, and 2024 IRC Annual Reports.

The below goals work together to strengthen coordination among service providers in order to provide equitable access to reentry supports across Illinois. Connecting providers through regional hubs and listing them in a reentry services database will allow for returning residents to access centralized and consistent support. Public agencies will support community providers through fiscal support and program partnerships to ensure a smooth transition from incarceration to community. The goals prioritize peer leadership, reducing barriers for returning residents to access supports, consistently expanding the network, and voluntary participation in order to ensure that services address both individual and community-level needs.

- 1) Create a coordinated and effective network of localized support 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 that is widely accessible, with an emphasis on voluntary services that are reflective of both needs and individuals' personal goals. Integrate this with the housing database.
 - i. Identify a partner to maintain this database, uplifting opportunities for people with lived experience to contribute to this maintenance.

- ii. Implement a system for database expansion and edits.
 - iii. Integrate database outreach into reentry events and reentry resource centers to maximize awareness and utilization.
 - iv. Distribute a printable version of the database for people with limited technology access.
 - b. Engage individuals who have received support and services, as well as organizations which serve returning individuals, to identify challenges and successes in order to routinely update and improve provided services.
 - c. 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 administrative resources needed. These regional hubs would be made up of government, non-profit, and community-based entities working together to provide support and services according to the specific needs of each region. The hubs should be accessible; people would be able to find all the resources at a physical centralized location.
 - d. Build collective capacity of community-based organizations that support individuals reentering in holistic, trauma-informed, and gender-responsive ways.
 - i. Focus on equitably building up resources downstate and in rural areas
 - e. Collaborate with and support IDOC Northern and Southern Reentry Managers on in-reach and connection to resources before leaving incarceration.
 - f. Establish effective communication channels between organizations who can provide services and the people who need them.
- 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.
 - a. Identify and adopt policies and practices for visitation, telephone, and family-organized events that are uniform across facilities
 - b. Support efforts to expand access to transportation for families to visit their loved ones who are incarcerated
 - c. Develop metrics that allow these policies and practices to be evaluated
 - 3) Support and expand physical and behavioral health services and social-emotional wellness support (including coaching and workshops) that is healing-centered and trauma-informed for individuals who are incarcerated and those 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 support and services.
 - 5) Expand access to pre-release social services (i.e. State IDs, Medicaid and SNAP enrollment) and monitor and support the implementation of pre-release social service enrollments, particularly interagency collaborations. Some of these collaborations include:
 - a. State IDs (Secretary of State and IDOC)
 - b. SNAP Benefits (Department of Human Services working with IDOC and county jails)
 - c. Medicaid enrollment (Department of Human Services on behalf of the Department of Healthcare and Family Services, with IDOC)
 - d. Social Security Insurance (Department of Human Services with Social Security Administration and IDOC)
 - e. Re-enrolling in veterans' benefits (Department of Veterans Affairs)

Special Considerations Working Group (Co-Chairs: Willette Benford – Office of the First Lady; Colette Payne – Women’s Justice Institute; Alyssa Williams – Illinois Department of Corrections)

The majority of reentry programs cater to working-age men, mostly Black, single, and low-income. Without devaluing those programs, the Illinois Reentry Council recognizes that those programs do not serve many people with special physical, mental, familial, traumatic, and personal considerations. The Special Considerations Workgroup has worked to develop a deeper understanding of what populations are missed in general reentry programming, and what people need to be successful. Using the initial list of populations who require special consideration when providing reentry supports, the workgroup has learned about what barriers these groups face and has developed a substantial list of policy and practice considerations for these groups. More accomplishments related to the Special Considerations Workgroup can be found in the 2022, 2023, and 2024 IRC Annual Reports.

These goals are designed to identify populations with specific reentry needs and ensure that the policies developed by the Council are inclusive of the populations identified below. By highlighting key needs for specific groups, this list can serve as a resource for other workgroups' discussions around housing, healthcare, economic opportunity, and more. Continuing to engage and listen to people who represent one or many of the populations below will ensure that the considerations and education of the workgroup remain relevant and most effective.

- 1) Identify groups of people with special considerations that should be addressed when developing reentry policies and practices, while acknowledging that intersectionality often exists among these groups. Thus far, workgroup members have identified the following (in no particular order):
 - a. Aging and elderly people;
 - b. People who have served/are serving long and extremely long sentences (20 years+);
 - c. LGBTQIA2S+ & gender-nonconforming people;
 - d. Women;
 - e. People with intellectual and neurodevelopmental disorders;
 - f. People with serious mental illnesses and/or substance use disorder;
 - g. People subject to state banishment laws;
 - h. People who are undocumented;
 - i. Veterans;
 - j. People with children/other dependents;
 - k. People who experienced and survived domestic violence;
 - l. People who experienced and survived human trafficking;
 - m. People with physical disabilities;
 - n. Youth;
 - o. Emerging adults;
 - p. People formerly involved in the child welfare system;
 - q. People listed on public conviction registries, particularly the sex offender registry;
 - r. D/deaf and hard of hearing people;
 - s. People deemed unfit to stand trial;
 - t. People civilly committed to IDOC custody;
 - u. People who are exonerated;
- 2) Refine the list of policy and practice changes for each group, acknowledging that many groups have overlapping considerations, and create an action plan for the workgroup to tackle the challenges. Policy and practice considerations for the above groups include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Identifying gender-appropriate housing (relevant especially for: LGBTQIA2S+ and gender non-conforming individuals; women)
 - b. Receiving proper identification (relevant especially for: Gender non-confirming individuals; individuals who are undocumented; victims of human trafficking; youth and emerging adults)
 - c. Accessing appropriate mental and physical healthcare resources (relevant especially for: Aging & elderly individuals; seriously mentally ill and those with substance use disorder and other disabilities; individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities; D/deaf and hard of hearing people; people who are undocumented; veterans)

- i. Specific barriers relevant to this consideration include: passing background check processes in nursing homes; receiving proper translation resources; dementia care; pre-release assessment and connection with community-based services; understanding how people are re-assessed for mental health diagnoses after initial intake; and treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder
 - d. Identifying and addressing specific neurological and developmental needs (relevant especially for: people with intellectual and neurodevelopmental disorders)
 - e. Additional fines and fees that impede upward mobility (relevant especially for: people with children or dependents; women; people on public registries; people who served long and extremely long sentences)
 - f. Specific barriers relevant to this consideration include: fines and fees required to comply with public registries; child support fees
 - g. Higher risk of lacking family or community supports (relevant especially for: people who are undocumented; people who served long and extremely long sentences)
 - h. Lacking digital literacy (relevant especially for: aging and elderly people; people who served long and extremely long sentences)
 - i. Restricted housing due to banishment laws (relevant especially for: people on the sex offender registry; people civilly committed to IDOC custody)
 - j. Family reunification needs (relevant especially for: people with children or dependents; women)
 - i. Specific barriers relevant to this consideration include: obtaining guardianship; accessing parent preparation classes
 - k. Need for supportive housing (relevant especially for: people with intellectual and neurodevelopmental disorders; aging and elderly people)
 - i. Specific barriers relevant to this consideration include: accessing nursing homes with a record, especially as it relates to finding placements for individuals leaving IDOC under the Joe Coleman Medical Release Act.
 - l. Need for relationship building programming (relevant especially for: people who served long and extremely long sentences; youth; emerging adults; people formerly involved in the child welfare system)
 - m. Re-enrolling in existing public benefits upon release from incarceration (relevant especially for: veterans; people with intellectual and neurodevelopmental disabilities; people with physical disabilities)
 - i. Specific barriers relevant to this consideration include: re-enrolling in Social Security Disability Insurance; re-enrolling in veterans benefits
- 3) Ensure that service providers and government agencies understand the above special considerations relevant to the people they serve and encourage them to prioritize meeting these needs.
- 4) Collaborate and advise other workgroups to ensure that housing, support services, and economic opportunities are equitably accessible to individuals with special considerations and focus on long-term solutions to the barriers they face.
 - a. Ensure that members are educated and comfortable discussing the needs and barriers of the specific populations identified above, in order to advocate for meeting these needs and addressing these barriers in other Council Working Groups.
- 5) Identify currently incarcerated individuals' needs, interests, and concerns 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.

Housing Workgroup (Co-Chairs: Reality Allah – Corporation for Supportive Housing; Gianna Baker – Illinois Black Advocacy Initiative; Richard Rowe – Office to Prevent and End Homelessness; Alan Zais – Northern Illinois Regional Affordable Community Housing)

Housing stability is a key factor in a person's success while reintegrating after incarceration. However, funding for existing homelessness resources and housing authorities discriminate against people with records. Many landlords incorrectly believe that a criminal record is a predictor for tenant behavior. The Department of Corrections has provided transitional housing for people on supervised release, but returning residents lack equitable access to long-term stable housing programs. The Illinois Reentry Council grew out of a 2010s Re-Entry Housing Task Force and Reentry Housing Pilots that launched amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, when prisons released more people earlier to reduce the virus' spread within facilities. Since its launch in 2021, the Illinois Reentry Council's Housing Workgroup has aimed to understand and address the key barriers to housing stability faced by people with records. Data has been crucial in this mission, and the group has learned from existing data collected by the Department of Corrections and the homelessness system, as well as new data collected through reentry housing pilot programs and research conducted by the Council and its members. The workgroup has developed a vision of a housing continuum that addresses the spectrum of housing needs for people with records. Members of the workgroup grew their knowledge of affordable housing development and have created new affordable housing for returning residents. The workgroup has continued to support efforts to monitor the implementation and impact of the Cook County *Just Housing Ordinance*, which created a clear background check process for landlords to follow when receiving rental tenant applications. More accomplishments related to the Housing Workgroup can be found in the 2022, 2023, and 2024 IRC Annual Reports.

The below goals create a reentry housing system that is consistently creating new housing for returning residents, engages and educates new people to participate in housing development, and ensures that housing is accessible for people with records and is well funded. Housing funding opportunities will encourage landlords to fairly screen tenants, and experienced housing navigators will connect people with housing and foster relationships with landlords. Reentry housing opportunities will accompany wraparound support services as needed. Ensuring at-risk affordable housing options do not become vulnerable to market rates will also allow for the total number of available housing grows. Affordable housing development will address the spectrum of housing needs for returning residents as they require various levels of support. Training resources will be available for people interested, but lacking experience, in housing development. By protecting existing units and bringing in reentry partners to build new units, more affordable housing will be available for people with records.

- 1) Create a detailed, data-driven view of housing and support needs (*in partnership with Support Services working group*) of individuals preparing to exit incarceration.
 - a. Finalize the modified Housing Assessment Tool (built off the Housing Discharge Planning Assessment), ensuring 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 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 for people in reentry and community violence intervention programs.

- 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 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. Create a "Reentry Housing Messaging Toolkit", which strives to address landlords' most common hesitations and misconceptions and builds awareness to the most effective tools and levers (e.g., incentives) available to landlords today.
 - c. 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 for 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 of people returning from prisons and jails, prioritizing those funders controlling the greatest share of housing currently in need.
- 5) Create educational resources for less experienced individuals (particularly those who are previously incarcerated) and service providers to effectively navigate the process of creating / rehabilitating affordable housing.
 - a. Create a detailed "Opportunity Development Playbook" as a written guide, synthesizing existing guidance and gathering feedback from less-experienced developers who have gone through a housing development process.
 - b. Establish a Housing Institute to provide cohort-based technical assistance that prepares reentry organizations to apply for and receive housing development funding.
 - c. Develop communication strategies to encourage reentry providers to engage in housing development and to utilize the resources developed through the Playbook and the Institute.
- 6) Identify affordable housing properties at highest risk of converting to market-rate and develop tailored strategies to ensure properties remain affordable and that existing affordable housing stock remains available to all low-income families, including formerly incarcerated people.
 - 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, integrated with the services 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, and identify potential partners
 - b. Align on critical requirements of the 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) Work to remove policy barriers that restrict formerly incarcerated people from being able to access housing (i.e., banishment laws and sobriety requirements) and barriers that could result in someone being incarcerated for experiencing homelessness (*in partnership with the Special Considerations Workgroup*)

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 align for change 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.