

## Legislative Priority: REENTRY



As Ohio's prison population exceeds 50,000, at an annual cost of over \$1.2 billion dollars, making the need to focus on Reentry services is critical and clear. 24,000 people return to communities throughout Ohio each year with 6,000 in Cuyahoga County alone. Due to discrimination and other barriers, these individuals and their families face extreme challenges with respect to securing employment, safe housing, valid forms of identification and health services, especially mental health.

Ohio United Way, through its member agencies has been involved with Reentry programs for many years, but due to record high numbers of inmates, combined with the economic environment faced when released in 2012, expanded Reentry focus by local and state officials and organizations is warranted.

### Of particular concern is:

Laws that effectively legalize employment discrimination based on conviction or arrest records, preventing ex-offenders from obtaining lawful employment, a principle means for reintegration.

Ohio's inmate population continues a growth trend that could reach 56,000 in 6 years, overextending a system designed to house 38,300. Cost estimates for new prisons exceed \$1 billion to build and maintain.

Average annual costs per incarcerated person exceed \$26,000 as compared to \$5,000 per person for optimal community-based programs.

50% of Ohio's incarcerated adults have minor children at home.

60% of inmates spend less than a year in jail, raising the question of whether alternative diversion programs might be more successful and cost effective.

### Positive signs include:

The success of Reentry Courts can be found in every county in which they have been established including Richland, Cuyahoga, Summit and Stark where recidivism rates fall well below the state and national average. These Courts, through advanced monitoring and supervision, as well as job and education training, family support services and mentoring, help to limit growth in prison population while improving communities.

The passage of House Bill 86 in 2011 and its steps to address over-incarceration includes the increase of felony thresholds for certain offences, diversion to community based facilities and programs in place of incarceration for some individuals and "risk reduction sentencing" for certain circumstances.

The establishment of statewide initiatives including the Ex-Offender Reentry Coalition, Citizen Circles, Comprehensive Anti-Gang Initiative, and the Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections' Family Orientation Programs.

The work of local programs including the Cleveland Office of Reentry, Cleveland Transition Center, Summit County Reentry Network and the West Central Ohio Reentry Coalition.

The development of effective risk assessment tools that help distinguish between inmates who can be safely paroled and those who need to remain incarcerated.

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Ohio  
United Way

## Legislative Priority:

# REENTRY (continued)

## Ohio United Way supports the following legislative initiatives:

Legislation which includes "Ban the Box" for employment applications, and the sealing of criminal records of non violent offenders, to remove certain barriers to employment for returning individuals who continue to face collateral sanctions when trying to put their lives together.

Sustain existing Reentry Courts and to introduce these Courts in additional Ohio counties.

Provide appropriate cost-saving sentencing options that are designed to prevent recidivism and avert expensive new prison construction.

Expansion and funding of community based programs that support and strengthen families during and after incarceration, designed to prevent recidivism.