



North Carolina's Reentry Action Plan

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This document was prepared by the North Carolina Department of Public Safety, Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice, in partnership with the Office of the Governor.

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Background

Focused efforts on reentry for people in prison and formerly incarcerated individuals began in North Carolina as early as 2009. That year then-Attorney General Roy Cooper requested that Gov. Perdue sign Executive Order No. 12, the Governor's StreetSafe Task Force to Stop Repeat Offenders. The Executive Order charged the StreetSafe Task Force, co-chaired by then-Attorney General Cooper, with establishing policy goals that would serve as a roadmap for state policymakers, agencies, and community groups to coordinate reentry planning and preparation initiatives. The Task Force's 2010 report contained 24 recommendations organized around seven major principles: 1) creating a cohesive continuum of services; 2) increasing educational and work opportunities; 3) increasing safe, affordable housing options; 4) providing incentives for living with legal boundaries (e.g., pardons, certificates of relief, expungement, and other incentives for formerly incarcerated people to continue living crime-free lives); 5) ensuring inmates have a clean slate upon release from prison; 6) coordinating state government services; and 7) educating the public.

In 2010, the NC General Assembly created the Joint Select Committee on Ex-Offender Reintegration into Society. This legislative committee issued a report in January 2011 outlining 15 recommendations for legislative and agency actions. Many of those recommendations were enacted including the legislative directive to designate the Rehabilitative Programs and Services (RP&S) Section (formerly Research and Planning) of the Department of Public Safety (DPS) as the single state authority responsible for the coordination and implementation of reentry policy initiatives and as the entity directed to create local reentry councils across the state.

Reentry advocates, stakeholders, legislators, and state agency representatives have used the StreetSafe Report and the legislative report as the foundation for the state's approach to the reintegration of formerly incarcerated people. Some of these recommendations have been implemented through legislation and/or state policy directives. Anecdotally, those actions have reduced recidivism and enhanced public safety; data from the North Carolina Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission should be available within the next year that reinforces the impact of local reentry councils. While much has been accomplished, there is more work ahead. The work of the StreetSafe Task Force provides the basis for many of the components in this Reentry Action Plan.

Overview

In 2017, his first year in office, Governor Roy Cooper charged Secretary of the Department of Public Safety Erik Hooks and the Department's Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice (DACJJ) with developing this Reentry Action Plan in consultation with the Governor's Office and

with input from stakeholders. As the plan indicates, multiple efforts related to reentry for formerly incarcerated individuals already are underway.

The purpose of this plan is to facilitate a better transition from incarceration or community supervision (i.e., probation, post-release, or parole) back into society by coordinating existing resources, identifying resource gaps, and advocating on behalf of individuals with criminal records. To develop and implement this plan, DACJJ is building formal partnerships with state and local agencies, non-profit and community-based organizations, and key stakeholders to sustain these efforts through community engagement and ownership. The benefits of these efforts are evident for individuals with criminal backgrounds and implementing this Reentry Action Plan also will make NC communities safer, healthier and more economically viable.

A key to the success of this Reentry Action Plan will be the development of additional local reentry councils and repurposing prison facilities for reentry purposes. As of the end of 2017, there are 14 reentry councils, all of which receive state and/or federal funding. The existing councils cover 20 counties and the goal is to expand the availability of reentry councils to all 100 counties. The purpose of a local reentry council is to coordinate resources in the community for formerly incarcerated people and their families that will facilitate a successful transition from the criminal justice system back into society. Expansion of the reentry council model to additional areas of the state will help DACJJ further coordinate community resources to provide effective pre-release assistance in communities across the state.

As part of the repurposing effort, DACJJ has identified 18 adult prisons to become designated reentry facilities that will concentrate on providing comprehensive pre-release planning and preparation for incarcerated individuals. This process started on June 1, 2017 with a target group housed at two minimum custody facilities (Lincoln Correctional Center and Wake Correctional Center). The effort means that a small group of inmates housed at these facilities will receive an orientation and must agree to participate in reentry planning and programming over the remaining term of their incarceration. The reentry planning will result in development of an individualized reentry plan created jointly by the incarcerated individual, prison staff, community resource partners, and the Reentry Probation Officer based on identified reentry needs.

There are currently approximately 50 inmates participating in this process. These participants are the inmates already housed at these facilities who met the criteria at the start of the pilot program. Through natural attrition, more beds will open at these facilities and DACJJ will transfer in inmates who meet the criteria. By June 1, 2018, the repurposing process will be underway at seven (7) minimum custody facilities that will become designated reentry facilities.

Current Reentry Efforts

Current DACJJ reentry initiatives consist of expanding reentry programming, establishing designated reentry facilities, expanding local reentry councils, creating a State Reentry Council Collaborative (SRCC) as required in 2017 legislation, and developing and implementing this long-term Reentry Action Plan. To date, DACJJ has successfully implemented 14 local reentry councils that cover 20 counties, with 5 new councils added in 2017.

As noted above, in collaboration with community stakeholders, DACJJ is developing a model process for designated reentry facilities to prepare incarcerated individuals who are returning to their communities. These efforts will only be successful if DACJJ receives support from other “champions” representing state and local entities to assist in providing resources and services to incarcerated and supervised individuals.

There are six (6) key components of this Reentry Action Plan that, with the assistance of other stakeholders, can greatly assist individuals with their reentry process.

Components of the Reentry Action Plan

1) Create a State Reentry Council Collaborative

Pursuant to Session Law 2017-57, Section 16C.10, the Secretary of NCDPS will establish the State Reentry Council Collaborative (SRCC) to “study the needs of ex-offenders who have been recently released from a correctional institution and to increase the effectiveness of local reentry councils.” Beginning November 1, 2017 and annually thereafter, the SRCC will report its findings and recommendations to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Justice and Public Safety. In addition, the SRCC will coordinate reentry work across the state by:

- Coordinating and implementing reentry policy initiatives for formerly incarcerated individuals and other people with criminal records.
- Creating work groups that will inform SRCC recommendations.
 - Focus areas for the work groups may include employment, mental health care, substance use, transportation, health, family reunification, vocational training, housing, evaluation and accountability, education, awareness, policy, sustainability, and other issues identified by the SRCC, LRCs, and others.
- Holding stakeholders such as state agencies and policymakers accountable for developing and implementing the recommendations of this Reentry Action Plan.

The legislation requires the following members of the SRCC:

- Representatives (up to two) from agencies across state and local government to include NC Department of Transportation Division of Motor Vehicles, Department of Health and Human Services, NC Department of Commerce Division of Workforce Solutions, NC Community College System, the Administrative Office of the Courts, and the Attorney General's office

The legislation gives discretion to the Secretary of DPS to include stakeholders from various sectors, which may include nonprofit entities, community-based service providers, faith-based organizations and fair chance employers.

The SRCC will strive to facilitate collaboration such that recommendations from the SRCC are implemented by the network of local reentry councils. Additionally, the SRCC "principal" members (e.g., cabinet secretaries) would participate in quarterly meetings; however other SRCC members and stakeholders participating on work groups would be expected to attend all meetings of the SRCC.

Note: The SRCC met for the first time in October 2017 with another meeting scheduled for February 2018. The full SRCC will convene approximately every three months and work groups will meet in between. The SRCC expects to continue meeting as long as it is helping to provide productive support and positive outcomes for statewide reentry efforts.

2) Develop detailed implementation components of the Reentry Action Plan

The SRCC will be a driving force in the development of the details of this Reentry Action Plan. Based on the tentative meeting schedule and work plan, the initial recommendations will be developed over a 12-month period, and periodically updated thereafter.

Key components of the Reentry Action Plan will consist of the following:

- Evaluation of StreetSafe Task Force recommendations, both those that have been implemented and those that have not, to determine which items have the potential to improve recidivism in current conditions
- Evaluation of recommendations from the Joint Select Committee on Ex-Offender Reintegration into Society to determine which items have the potential to improve recidivism in current conditions
- Collaboration among key stakeholders
- Development of a knowledge base to inform future reentry policies or legislation
- Identification and implementation of solutions that address core challenges in the reentry process

- Incorporation of policies, procedures, and practices that include:
 - Identification of appropriate local staff configuration to accommodate client flow to local reentry councils
 - Measurement of outcomes to promote accountability
 - Review of policies, programs, and procedures to create more pathways to opportunity for people with criminal records
 - Identification of gaps in existing reentry programs and services
 - Review of the state licensing procedures to eliminate barriers to employment
 - An annual report to the Legislature and the Governor on the progress of the reentry initiative.

3) Provide Capacity Building and Technical Support to Local Reentry Councils

DACJJ is focused on developing, strengthening and maintaining the skills, processes, and resources needed for sustainable local reentry councils to adapt and thrive in their communities. Local reentry councils need this capacity building training and technical support to help with sustainability and development of their councils within their communities.

Capacity Building and Development

An early action item for the plan will be to identify potential sources of capacity building and development support for local reentry councils. By engaging experts on organizational capacity building, each local reentry council would receive individualized training and support for growth and development.

The areas of focus for capacity building may include:

- Financial support for reentry
- Developing community-based collaboratives
- Strategic planning and board development
- Sustainability planning and fund development

Local Reentry Council Convening

Coordinating a one day workshop for local reentry council staff, intermediary agency staff, and executive committee members would provide the opportunity for a shared learning experience on how to better serve justice-involved individuals. The one day gathering would involve about 40-50 people.

Local reentry councils are not budgeted for staff training and development and would not be able to cover the cost of this workshop. The cost could be covered using some of a Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation grant to the Governor's Office.

Note: This convening took place on November 17, 2017. Over 70 participants were in attendance, including representatives from all 14 local reentry councils. Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive. If resources allow, more opportunities like this can be planned in the future.

Ongoing Technical Support

Technical support for local reentry councils would include developing the service provider network, creating a referral and intake process, applying evidence-based practices for assessment, case plan development and case management, utilizing employment training programs for in-demand jobs, building relationships with public housing authorities, and monitoring and tracking reentry outcomes.

Technical support is ongoing and currently provided by DACJJ reentry staff with no additional funds necessary.

4) Expand and Formalize Involvement of Faith-Based and Community-Based Organizations in Reentry

Faith-based organizations, community-based organizations, and non-profits can have a robust role in the reentry process. As recommended by the StreetSafe Task Force, members of faith-based and community-based organizations volunteer in correctional facilities across the state. Most of these services include religious activities such as worship services, bible study, prayer circles, and support-group counseling. Additionally, individuals who are approved by DPS can become "community leave" sponsors and take eligible inmates into the community for worship services, Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous group meetings, and to participate in various pro-social activities.

DACJJ is aware that on an informal basis, these volunteers are providing a range of reentry supports to individuals preparing for release. This informal reentry support can range from assistance with employment, housing, and transportation, to providing mentorship or serving as character references.

In response to the lack of formal engagement of faith-based and community-based organizations in reentry activities, NC's Reentry Action Plan facilitates and expands on the

efforts of community and faith-based institutions to engage and mentor incarcerated individuals.

The goal is to create formal partnerships with these organizations to provide training on topics that will help justice-involved individuals with social and lifestyle changes necessary for their transition back into their communities. Specifically, the plan is to:

- Provide appropriate training and education to these organizations so they are skilled and equipped to work with justice-involved individuals;
- Involve representatives of these organizations in the pre-release planning and preparation to serve as facilitators, educators, advisors, and mentors to returning citizens;
- Ensure that the delivery of reentry services by these organizations is consistent with evidence-based practices;
- Expand opportunities for community-based organizations to provide entrepreneurship training to individuals preparing for release;
- Establish pilot programs at reentry facilities or other prison facilities where faith-based and community-based organizations would provide targeted programming for incarcerated individuals preparing for release; and
- Host a two-day statewide reentry conference for faith-based organizations and nonprofits that would focus on evidence-based practices, working with inmates and the justice-involved population, and understanding correctional policies and procedures. DPS has hosted this type of conference (in 2007, 2008, and 2009), which would likely draw 300-500 participants.

The plan includes placement of reentry probation officers to provide continuity. Reentry probation officers are probation/parole officers who also help with transition and are more hands-on at the designated reentry facilities. Reentry probation officers will follow up on these structured activities delivered by faith-based and community-based organizations by utilizing evidence-based tools such as Carey Guides. These tools are used to help justice-involved individuals reflect on their decisions, evaluate their thinking, and identify alternative choices in difficult situations. Note: Carey Guides are proprietary materials, specifically worksheets, used by Probation Officers to facilitate difficult discussions with justice-involved people about issues they are dealing with such as substance use, family issues, poor decision-making, and criminal thinking patterns.

5) Resolve Warrants and Pending Charges Prior to Release (SL 2015-48)

SL 2015-48 directs law enforcement and the courts to improve judicial efficiency using the electronic repository commonly known as NCAWARE to resolve outstanding warrants while a defendant is in custody.

DACJJ, the Administrative Office of the Courts, and the Conference of District Attorneys have started reviewing the process for identifying warrants and addressing pending charges. These entities are jointly creating a request form that correctional staff will utilize in communicating with local district attorneys' offices to resolve outstanding warrants and pending charges prior to release. Successful implementation will require cooperation with local district attorneys.

If successfully implemented, SL 2015-48 will resolve cases and alleviate conflicts that can arise when people who face outstanding warrants and pending charges seek employment, housing, and other resources after their release.

6) Address Major Reentry Barriers with the Assistance of Multiple Stakeholders

DACJJ data show that transitional employment, transitional housing, transportation, and substance use disorder and mental health treatment are major barriers that would have a significant positive impact on reentry outcomes if successfully addressed. These barriers are complex and will take long-term planning and the coordinated efforts of multiple stakeholders to address successfully.

- Transitional Employment – Connect returning citizens to fair chance employers and employment services before and after their release to the community.
 - Employability training – provide “soft skills” training to facilitate job readiness and job retention.
 - Transitional Jobs Initiative – an example is the Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO), which has developed an evidence-based transitional job program, designed to enable people recently released from incarceration to quickly and successfully rejoin the workforce.
 - Reentry Supportive Hiring – determine which industries and employers are willing to hire people with criminal records and encourage job development and placement in those sectors. In addition, encourage reentry supportive employers to educate others by sharing strategies for hiring formerly incarcerated people.
 - Transitional Employment Research – identify strategies or initiatives that assist an individual with a criminal record in obtaining and retaining viable employment while under community supervision.

- Jobs Network – cultivate a network of private employers willing to hire individuals with criminal backgrounds.
- Financial Incentives – develop state-supported financial incentives for employers to hire individuals with criminal backgrounds.
- Certificate of Relief (COR)—encourage broader utilization of the COR and increase awareness of it as a tool that can remove some of the civil disabilities that arise due to a criminal conviction, especially in the employment context. Specifically, an administrative agency, government official, or court in a civil proceeding may consider a COR in determining whether a conviction should result in disqualification. Specific criteria determine eligibility for the COR but once issued, a COR protects employers from negligent hiring lawsuits.
- Transitional Housing (“Reentry Housing”) – Facilitate a person’s access to stable housing upon his or her reentry into the community.
 - Contract with private landlords and housing providers for reentry housing to meet the specific and unique needs of people released from prison or at risk for homelessness while under community supervision. Establish financial incentives for private sector or nonprofit housing developers or community-based organizations to develop housing accessible to people leaving prison or at risk for homelessness while under community supervision.
 - Foster stability in housing for individuals released to the community by:
 1. Educating policymakers regarding the lack of affordable and supportive housing, and promoting legislative options to improve access to affordable housing.
 2. Educating communities and building community support for increased affordable housing.
 3. Increasing the variety of affordable and supportive housing models offered by community-based providers.
 4. Supporting evidenced-based permanent supportive housing models in multiple jurisdictions, particularly where there are high concentrations of high utilizers (people who frequently cycle through jails, hospitals, homeless shelters, and mental health facilities).
- Transportation - Develop and locate available transportation resources for individuals transitioning back into their communities.
 - Develop agreements with existing transportation services.
 - Utilize public transportation services where applicable.
 - Encourage district attorneys and the AOC to offer amnesty days or warrant clearance days (similar to expungement clinics) to facilitate more justice involved people becoming licensed drivers by creating a path to license restoration.

- Support local legal service providers in providing driver’s license restoration clinics, particularly in the jurisdictions with local reentry councils.
- Substance Use and Mental Health Treatment/Aftercare - Collaborate with statewide agencies and community-based providers to ensure that a person’s substance use and mental health treatment and aftercare can continue uninterrupted upon returning to their communities.¹
 - Engage community-based mental health care system in providing pre- and post-release services to returning citizens with mental health needs.
 - Engage community-based substance use services to provide effective, culturally-competent services to returning citizens pre- and post-release.
 - Ensure coordination of substance use and mental health services, pre- and post-release to facilitate continuum of care.

Note on Integrated Themes

While this plan is organized by topic, there are cross-cutting themes that have an impact on all of the work discussed in this plan.

Policy development and implementation – Evidence-based policies and practices connected to the areas covered by this plan must be implemented effectively to ensure positive outcomes.

Culture – There are strategies for reducing stigma and bringing awareness to stories of successful reentry, including highlighting people who have had an incarceration experience and who are now thriving. The plan encourages language (e.g., in speeches, documents, and websites) that reflects support for second chances. The terms “felon,” “ex-con,” and “ex-offender” can forever brand people by their past actions. Examples of non-stigmatizing language to use both verbally and in writing include “people in prison,” “people who have been to prison,” and “people with criminal records.”

Communication – Developing clear and ongoing communication among state and local agencies, and between agencies and external partners such as the local reentry councils, non-profit partners, faith-based organizations, and other stakeholders is critical to success. In addition, communications materials can buttress the importance of second chances, not only to support formerly incarcerated people, but also to help achieve public safety, less strain on the court system and community well-being. These communication materials can be developed and

¹ Medicaid expansion would increase the number of individuals who can smoothly transition to receiving this treatment in their communities. While NC is not yet an expansion state, Medicaid expansion is a top priority for the Governor.

shared widely among businesses, law enforcement agencies, faith communities, and other stakeholders.

Conclusion

This plan outlines key actions and plans, but there are many efforts underway that are not covered in this document. Likewise, this plan describes participation from various agencies, but there are many more agencies, nonprofits, and individuals working to reduce recidivism across North Carolina that are not reflected in this document. Forming effective partnerships is key to the success of this plan, so it will be vital to include those entities as this work moves forward.