

Introduction and Testimony on the Ohio Ex-Offender Reentry Coalition

Chairwoman Gillmor and members of the Sunset Review Commission. I am Ed Rhine, Deputy Director of the Office of Policy and Offender Reentry for the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction. I am pleased to appear before you today to provide brief testimony regarding the work of the Ohio Ex-Offender Reentry Coalition, and to advocate for continuation of its statutory authorization. I have provided each committee member with a copy of my testimony, and supportive documentation.

Testimony

The Ohio Ex-Offender Reentry Coalition, a non-funded entity, (hereafter the “Reentry Coalition”) is designed to serve as a focal point for expanding and improving reentry efforts across state and local agencies and communities. The coalition was created by House Bill 130 of the 127th General Assembly, which became effective in April of 2009.

The mission of the Reentry Coalition is to ensure successful offender reentry, reduce recidivism, and enhance public safety through collaborative partnerships with government entities, faith and community-based organizations, and other stakeholders. Its statutory membership is comprised of the following agencies: the Departments of Rehabilitation and Correction, Aging, Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services, Commerce, Development, Education, Health, Job and Family Services, Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, Public Safety, Youth Services, and the Ohio Board of Regents, the Governor’s Office of Faith-Based Community Initiatives, the Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission, and a representative from the Ohio Health Care Licensing Board. Community and faith-based organizations, service providers, local governments, and individuals interested or involved in the reentry of offenders are invited to participate in the mission and actions of the Reentry Coalition as at-large members.

The Reentry Coalition operating in the public interest has quarterly open meetings wherein participation by organizations and individuals is welcomed. Further, the public is encouraged to provide input to the various sub-committees. Minutes from each meeting are posted on the Reentry Coalition’s website and distributed electronically via a Reentry Coalition email registrar.

The Reentry Coalition is nearing its first anniversary and will soon issue an annual report detailing its major accomplishments, activities, and legislative recommendations. Since it began meeting as a formal body in early 2009, a great deal of progress has been made, including the issuing of a five year comprehensive strategic plan, the creation of a website (www.reentrycoalition.ohio.gov), the production of a video called *The Face of Reentry*, and the formation of sub-

committees to carry out its vision and statutory mission. To date there has not been a formal public complaint filed against the Reentry Coalition.

Complementary federal legislation entitled “The Second Chance Act (SCA)” was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Bush on April 9, 2008, (P.L. 110-199). Designed to improve outcomes for people returning to communities from prisons and jails, this first-of-its-kind legislation authorizes federal grants to government agencies and nonprofit organizations to provide employment assistance, substance abuse treatment, housing, family programming, mentoring, victims support, and other services that can help reduce recidivism. The Second Chance Act calls for the development of detailed reentry strategic plans through the collaboration of state government agencies, and local, community stakeholders – as a condition for applying for funding under its auspices.

One of the more significant accomplishments of the Ohio Reentry Coalition has been support for the establishment of fourteen local reentry coalitions, some of which cover one county, others more regional in focus, inclusive of several counties. An additional thirteen local coalitions are in various stages of forming. It is anticipated that a large number of counties will begin discussions with key stakeholders about launching their own planning efforts to create a local reentry coalition. Staff persons representing statutory member agencies have been providing technical assistance to the local communities to establish and implement local reentry task forces. Technical assistance ranges from information sharing, identifying community needs and service gaps, uniting non-traditional service providers with government funded agencies, and offering assistance in developing a five-year strategic plan. This growth at the local level has led to coordinated efforts and community investments addressing service delivery for adults and juveniles and their families involved in the criminal justice system, aimed at reducing the duplication of services while promoting public safety.

Through the support of the Reentry Coalition, local jurisdictions and state agencies have become better positioned to apply for and receive federal funds appropriated under the Second Chance Act. This collaborative endeavor is about bringing dollars to Ohio, building safer communities, and investing in the welfare of Ohio’s families.

The efforts targeting local reentry coalitions are due, in part, to the collaborative efforts between the Office of Criminal Justice Services, DRC, DMH, DYS, and ODADAS and the issuance of a Reentry Grant RFP totaling \$4.7M utilizing Justice Assistance Grant American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds. The monies will support established local reentry coalitions with the implementation of their strategic plans, and assist other counties in developing local coalitions, all in an effort to position the State of Ohio to apply for Second Chance Act dollars.

Recently, the Reentry Coalition’s Collateral Sanctions Database sub-committee was able to secure funding through the Ohio State Bar Foundation totaling \$52,000. It

is anticipated that an electronic database of collateral sanctions will be created during the next twelve months.

DRC has also committed \$217,000 of Grant Funds to the implementation of the *Community Partners for Reentry* (CPR) mentoring model. This model, developed by Byron Johnson of Baylor University, is one of the goals in the Reentry Coalition's five-year strategic plan submitted by the Reentry Coalition. The funding was awarded to the Lucas and Montgomery County Task Forces.

The Reentry Coalition has provided ongoing support to state and local governments and community agencies in the pursuit of federal dollars. During calendar year 2009, the Reentry Coalition provided its constituents with preliminary grant review feedback by the Grants Development sub-committee members offering 25 letters of support for grant applications. The total amount of reentry grant dollars sought during the 2009 calendar year reached over \$14M.

In the months ahead, the Reentry Coalition will issue its first annual report, pursue the implementation of the goals and objectives in its strategic plan, expand its efforts to provide technical assistance and support to those counties seeking to form local reentry coalitions, and issue recommendations for addressing the many barriers that confront offenders as they make their reentry transition from prison to communities across Ohio.

In conclusion, Chairwoman Gillmor and members of the Sunset Review Commission. The Ohio Ex-Offender Reentry Coalition has worked collaboratively at the federal, state, and local levels to further Ohio's reentry efforts. On behalf of Director Moore who serves as statutory chair, and the other Coalition members, I pledge that the Reentry Coalition will continue its efforts to assist ex-offenders in becoming productive and taxpaying citizens, thereby enhancing public safety for all Ohioans. I would urge your support for continuation of the Coalition and its statutory mission. I am now pleased to address any questions you may have.