

Reentry Advocate

“Focused on Reducing Recidivism”

ODRC's New Director Ernie L. Moore

The recently appointed director of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction has one unique qualification no other individual who has held the position in the state before him can claim: Ernie L. Moore started at the bottom with the department 23 years ago as a corrections officer at the Correctional Reception Center in Orient, OH. He has gained so much experience along the way that he now teaches college-level courses on corrections at Cedarville University, and a sociology class at Tiffin University to boot.



Moore.
(Credit: File photo)

In the short term Director

Moore's goal is to move forward in the direction the previous director, Terry Collins, set for the department. "We've simply got to address the issue of overcrowding through some sort of sentencing reform ... we've got to have a better method of dealing with non-violent, low-level, short-term offenders other than sending them to prison. Prison is just too expensive ... when we can keep someone in the community through options like community-based corrections they can continue to work, pay taxes, and can better maintain family ties. Prison beds, which cost taxpayers \$25,000 per year, should be reserved for only predatory or violent offenders."

Moore continued on pg. 2

*We want to hear
from you...*

Voices from Behind Bars

Please submit your stories to:
P.O. Box 6031053
Cleveland, OH 44103

In This Issue

- 1.... *ODRC's New Director
Ernie L. Moore*
- 1.... *Employment and Reentry*
- 3.... *Editorial: "Smart Answers to
Recidivism," Part Two*
- 3.... *Federal Lawmakers Meet on
Reentry*
- 4.... *Attorney General Eric Holder
Addresses The National
Organization Of Black Law
Enforcement Executives*

Employment and Reentry

By James E. Walker Jr.

Former offenders and their supporters know too well the difficulties reentering persons encounter in their efforts to find employment. An ever-growing body of data from across the nation, too, magnifies the societal reluctance to allow



Walker.
(Credit: File photo)

persons convicted of criminal offenses a fair opportunity to recover from the mistakes of their past. While no one can argue the crucial role of employment in successful reentry, the larger community remains indifferent and impervious to that logic. What, one wonders, does it take for the clear message to sink in? Fiscal pressures strain public budgets all over the country. Recidivism

rates continue to spiral beyond all reason. What can we do to reverse these ominous trends?

One approach to expanding employment opportunities for former offenders, referred to here as Employment Access Certificates, has the potential to make the goal of successful reentry more attainable for more reentering persons.

Employment continued on pg. 2

2 • Reentry Advocate

Moore from pg. 1

Ohio has one of the few corrections departments in the nation that has “Rehabilitation” as part of its name, Director Moore pointed out, and he then went on to say, “We believe strongly that it’s our responsibility to help persons improve themselves while in our custody, so that when they do go back into society they’ll have more skills to help them be successful. Whether it’s vocational or college-level courses, we know the more education a prisoner obtains the better their chances are of not recidivating. In the long-term I’d like to find more ways of providing for additional educational opportunities for prisoners.”

Peer mentoring is also a concept the new director strongly believes in. “The idea of older, more

experienced prisoners, or even former prisoners who’ve returned home from prison and are now successful coming back into institutions and talking to younger prisoners and helping them to turn their lives around is something I’m all for. Sometimes, it doesn’t matter how much a staff member might say to a young prisoner, they’re not going to get the message until they hear it from someone who’s walked in their shoes, someone who has been down that path they are going down. It can make a real difference.”

Another idea Director Moore is excited about is called the “Inside Out Program,” which was initially started in Rahway State Prison in New Jersey. “What you do is take

a class of about a dozen college students who are in a criminology program, and have them come into the institution and take a class inside with a dozen prisoners. Both groups learn so much from each other. The college students gain valuable experience and insights, and the prisoners’ confidence is greatly improved when they find out they are just as intelligent as the students and can match minds with them. That’s a program I started when I was the warden at Lebanon, and we’re now doing at five different prisons ... this is the type of program I’d like to see implemented at every institution throughout the state. The feedback we’ve received from the colleges and the prisoners has been just tremendous.”

Employment from pg. 1

These certificates, known variously as Certificates of Rehabilitation, Certificates of Good Conduct, and Certificates of Relief from Disabilities in the five other states that have enacted them, provide former offenders an opportunity and a powerful incentive to demonstrate their personal commitment to rehabilitation. While the certificate provisions differ in the details they share a common intent and purpose: To support expanded employment opportunities for former offenders.

Without “forgiving” former

offenders their crimes, Employment Access Certificates certify that an individual who has a criminal background has completed self-improvement, vocational, educational, and/or therapeutic programming, and has actively embraced behaviors that signify his or her willingness and ability to function as a responsible, accountable, and positive member of society going forward. Each former offender who obtains a certificate earns it through diligent, consistent, and thoughtful action. The certificate presents the bearer

to prospective employers as someone worthy of the opportunity to work. In most cases, the certificate mitigates legal barriers to certain occupations, and provides employers legal protections against claims of negligent hiring—a legal construct that often renders employers financially liable for any untoward and injurious workplace behavior by a former offender.

Employers often cite the risk of a claim of negligent hiring as a primary reason for their unwillingness to hire former offenders.

Editorial: “Smart Answers to Recidivism”

Part Two of a Two-Part Series

Last month, part one of this New York Times editorial started off with the following: *Faced with soaring prison costs, states are finally focusing on policies that would help former prisoners stay out of jail after they are released. Some legislatures are reshaping laws that land parolees back inside for technical violations that should be dealt with on the outside. More than a dozen cities and counties have taken steps that make it easier for qualified ex-offenders to land government jobs, except in education and law enforcement and other sensitive areas from which people with convictions are normally barred by law.*

It ended by stating: *No*

reasonable person would suggest that a sex offender be given a job in an elementary school or day-care center. An ex-offender could not be disqualified for employment unless the offense was directly related to the job. Job seekers would no longer be required to disclose convictions on applications for state, county or municipal jobs. The offenses could still be uncovered in background checks, but they would no longer automatically rule out an applicant from the start.

A bill under consideration by the New Jersey Legislature would lift the state ban on food stamps and welfare benefits for people with felony drug convictions and would expand education and training

opportunities for inmates. And it would end an odious practice under which the prison system earns a profit by overcharging poor families for the collect calls they receive from relatives inside a system.

The added cost sometimes forces families to choose between putting food on the table or letting a child speak to an incarcerated parent.

The New Jersey Legislature has a chance to provide a new lease on life to thousands of families while offering a model for the rest of the nation.

Reentry Advocate supports this and other commonsense legislation, and encourages Ohio legislators to take a serious look at what other states are now doing.

Federal Lawmakers Meet on Reentry

Excerpted from NJTODAY.NET
WASHINGTON, D.C.—A bipartisan group of congressional and state leaders and experts on criminal justice policy came together last month to examine how states are changing their crime and corrections policies through “justice reinvestment” — an approach that uses data-driven, fiscally responsible policies and practices to increase public safety and

reduce recidivism and corrections spending.

In the past 20 years, spending on corrections has grown at a faster rate than every other state budget category except Medicaid, increasing from more than \$12 billion in 1988 to more than \$50 billion in 2008. The Pew Center on the States reports that more than 1 in 100 American adults are now behind bars.

Despite this tremendous

expenditure on prisons, recidivism rates remain high. In many states, half of all individuals released from state prison are reincarcerated within three years.

“It’s no secret that recidivism is costly and is overwhelming our prison system,” said Congressman Alan B. Mollohan, chairman of the appropriations subcommittee that funds the Bureau of Prisons.

Lawmakers continued on pg. 4

Attorney General Eric Holder Addresses the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE)

Excerpts from comments made by United States Attorney General Eric Holder to the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE) in Tampa, Fla. Friday, February 12, 2010

“In the months ahead, [the Department of Justice] plan[s] to give particular emphasis to initiatives aimed at tackling economic crime, international organized crime, youth violence, and the exploitation of children. We will also be focusing on improving our corrections system and ensuring that conditions are secure, humane, and aimed at rehabilitation.

I know there are two specific problems many of you are struggling to tackle, and I’d like to address them: First, the growing number of Americans – and disproportionate

number of African-Americans – currently incarcerated in prisons across our country; second, the division and tension that sometimes exists between law enforcement officers and the communities they work to protect.

As you all know, our nation now has the world’s highest incarceration rate. In the last 40 years, the number of inmates in American prisons has increased seven-fold. Today, one out of every 100 adults in America is behind bars.

Most of these prisoners are poor and uneducated. Twenty percent of them are Hispanic. Forty percent are black. In too many black families and neighborhoods, a “cradle-to-prison” life path has become the norm for young men. African-Americans are now eight times more likely to be

incarcerated as whites. And, if current trends continue, nearly 1 in 3 of our young black men will spend time behind bars.

Let me be clear, we enhance public safety by incarcerating those who harm our neighbors and our communities. This is a fact. But in our work to protect the American people, incarceration cannot be our only law enforcement strategy. We’ve learned that simply building more prisons and jails will not solve all our problems.

It’s time to face facts about our current approach to incarceration. It’s not sustainable. It’s not affordable. And we’ve seen that it isn’t always as effective as we think in reducing crime and keeping Americans safe.

NOBLE continued on pg. 5

Lawmakers from pg. 3

“In a series of hearings our subcommittee held last year on prisoner reentry, we heard from a wide range of professionals who delivered a common message — that recidivism reduction is a challenge that we can meet and must meet.”

Congressman Frank Wolf (R-VA) said, “The federal government must look to innovative state, local,

and faith-based programs to reform our broken corrections system.

As the former chairman and current ranking member of the House Commerce, Justice, Science Appropriations Subcommittee, which funds the Justice Department, I am deeply concerned about the recidivism crisis that is straining our corrections system at all levels. This summit, for the first time, brought

together the best leaders and programs in corrections reform.”

Congressmen Mollohan (D-WV) and Wolf (R-VA) were joined at the summit by their colleagues U.S. Senators Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), and U.S. Representatives Adam Schiff (D-CA), in addition to leaders from the U.S. Department of Justice and experts in state

Lawmakers continued on pg. 5

5 • Reentry Advocate

Employment from pg. 2

Statistics bear out employer fears, as employers lose approximately 80 percent of the negligent hiring claims made against them. The legal protection extended to employers who hire certificate-bearing former offenders, alone, highlights the potential benefits of Employment Access Certificates.

More work opportunities for former offenders will allow them to take care of themselves and their families, stabilize stressed communities and governmental budgets, increase public safety, and lower recidivism rates. As success breeds success, more successful reentry will go far to destigmatize all former offenders who

too often are viewed as no-accounts who will never amount to anything other than disruptive undesirables and a perpetual drain on the public coffers. This simple reform device, Employment Access Certificates, could very well promote healing, and a new sense of hope and possibility for our state and our nation.

Lawmakers from pg. 4

government, law enforcement, courts, corrections and community reentry. The summit was convened by the Pew Center on the States, the U.S. Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Public Welfare Foundation, and the Council of State Governments Justice Center.

The justice reinvestment approach has gained broad bipartisan

support and unprecedented attention on Capitol Hill. In November 2009, U.S. Senators Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), John Cornyn (R-TX) and Patrick Leahy (D-VT), together with U.S. Representatives Adam Schiff (D-CA) and Dan Lungren (R-CA), introduced The Criminal Justice Reinvestment Act of 2009 (S.2772/HR.4080).

The act authorizes the U.S. Attorney General to make grants to state and local governments and tribes to help jurisdictions to, among other things, analyze criminal justice trends to better understand what is driving the growth in their local jail and prison populations and to develop policy options to reduce expenditures.

NOBLE from pg. 4

Over the last few decades, state spending on corrections has risen faster than nearly any other budget item. Yet our best research suggests that there are other, more effective ways to invest taxpayer dollars and ensure public safety.

At a cost of \$60 billion a year, our prisons and jails do very little to prepare prisoners to get jobs and "go straight" after they're released. Former offenders are often barred from housing, shunned by potential employers, and surrounded by

other ex-offenders in their neighborhoods. This is a recipe for high recidivism. And it's the reason that two-thirds of those released are rearrested within three years.

It's time for a new approach.

If we are going to achieve positive outcomes for public safety, for state and local government budgets, for our communities, and for people who have been incarcerated and their families, we must begin to acknowledge that easy short-term solutions sometimes cause

long-term negative consequences.

The truth is that any real effort to contain spending on corrections, while ensuring public safety, must include a strong focus on preparing for reentry so we can reduce recidivism. Effective reentry programs can transform lives. They can ease difficult transitions. And they can provide our best chance for safeguarding our neighborhoods and supporting offenders who have served their time and who are also resolved to improve their lives."

NOW ON DVD

THE LONG ROAD HOME

The Story of Prisoner Reentry in Ohio

Hosted and Narrated by



Cuyahoga County Commissioner | featuring a dozen experts
PETER LAWSON JONES | on prisoner reentry

Copies of the DVD can be ordered by calling 216.469.0124, emailing mansfieldf@gmail.com or sending a check for \$15 to P.O. Box 6031053, Cleveland, OH 44103

The Citizen Circles Concept



Citizen participation and guidance is essential for correctional practices inside and outside institutions. The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction has embraced the needs related to offenders returning home from correctional settings and as

such one strategy is the implementation of Citizen Circles. The focus is on eight dynamic domain areas: employment, education, associates/social interactions, family/marital, substance abuse and community functioning, personal/emotional orientation and attitude.

They create partnerships that promote positive interaction and accountability for offenders upon release. Circle members address risks that contribute to criminal activity by taking ownership of the solution. It is an opportunity for citizens to communicate expectations for successful reentry and help offenders recognize the harm their behavior has caused others. Offenders are able to make amends and demonstrate their value and potential to the community.

Citizen Circles Locations

(Call for meeting dates and times)

The Euclid Avenue Citizen Circle Congregational Church

Kathleen Farkas
 9606 Euclid Ave.
 2nd Monday of every month at 7:00 pm
 216.421.0482 ext. 282

East Cleveland

Andrea Graham
 1850 Belmore Ave.
 Last Wednesday of every month at 5:00 pm
 216.249.0330

CEOGC

Medical Arts Building
 Lewis West
 2475 E. 22nd St.
 (Lower level)
 2nd Monday of every month at 11:30 am
 216.357.2621

Zion Chapel

Rev. Dennis Jonel
 4234 Lee Rd.
 3rd Monday of every month at 6:00 pm
 216.752.2743

Mt. Pleasant Murtis Taylor Center

Diane Coats
 13411 Kinsman Ave.
 1st Tuesday of every month at 6:00 pm
 216.751.1085

Reentry Advocate

"Focused on Reducing Recidivism"

P.O. Box 6031053
 Cleveland, OH 44103

COMMENTS OR SUGGESTIONS:
Mansfield B. Frazier, Editor
 email: MansfieldF@gmail.com

To receive a copy of **Going Home to Stay** call First Call for Help at 216.436.2000 or go online and download a copy at www.211cleveland.org/pdfs/communityreentry.pdf



The editors are always interested in additional success stories.
 Please send us an email at MansfieldF@gmail.com