

OFFENDER REENTRY SERVICES COALITION

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Support of the Offender Reentry Services Coalition (formerly PAPIS) programs is critical at a time when the Commonwealth is focusing on system-wide improvements for the reintegration and reentry of offenders into society. Maintaining programs to ease the transition from prison or jail to the community is essential to ensure public safety.

The programs administered by the Offender Reentry Services Coalition (Reentry Services) have successfully provided the bridge between state and local incarceration systems and the Virginia communities they serve for over 30 years. Continued state financial support is essential to keep our communities safe and to meet the needs of those released from incarceration by providing the tools to be self sufficient and crime free.

Background: During the 2004-2005 fiscal year, the nine programs that provide Reentry Services across the Commonwealth served 19,707 clients - state and local prisoners being released into society. Providers of programs include both local and state-wide community-based organizations with solid linkages to employers, faith-based organizations, landlords, and social services agencies. Reentry Services programs form a strong reentry system for persons released from local and state correctional facilities.

Reentry Services Provided

- Assistance with Obtaining Identification Documents
- Employability Skills Development
- Job Search/Job Placement Assistance
- Substance Abuse Education and Counseling/Treatment Referrals
- Emergency Services – housing, food, clothing

Benefits to the Commonwealth

- Public safety – National studies show that 44% of former prisoners are re-arrested within 12 months of release from prison or jail. However, those figures are reduced significantly (20% to 60%) with quality education, vocational and work programs. In fact only 17% of those participating in Reentry Services programs returned to prison after one year (2002 snapshot study)
- Serving an increasing need – In 2004, there were 12,546 prisoners released from our state prisons and thousands more from local jails in Virginia. More than 90% of all those who go to prison return to their communities.
- Sole source provider – Reentry Services programs are the only non-state agency entities in the Commonwealth providing pre-release and post-incarceration services.

- Reduced costs – Services were provided by Reentry Services programs through state and federal funding at an average cost of \$96 per participant per year compared to an incarceration cost of approximately \$22,000 per year for the Commonwealth
- Good financial sense – In 2004, \$23 million in taxable income was generated by 1,631 newly fully-employed Reentry Services program participants. By contrast, the current capital budget includes \$196.6 million in new prison construction, debt service for 3 prisons amounting to \$35 million in each of the next 10 biennia, with operating costs for these prisons adding another \$80 million each year once open.

Funding History

- In fiscal year 01-02 (the last year of full state funding), the Commonwealth funded Reentry Services programs at \$2.2 million
- During FY '05, Reentry Services programs operated using only federal Byrne Grant funds (match required)
- During the 2005 Session, the General Assembly agreed to provide \$371,000 in state funds along with Byrne Discretionary funds (no match required) to bring Reentry Services programs to the approximate fiscal year 01-02 funding level of just over \$2.1 million for the 2006 fiscal year.
- Given the temporary nature of the federal discretionary funds and the difficulty in accessing private funds, Reentry Services programs depend on continued state support to provide their valuable service.

Collaborative Efforts to avoid duplication of services

- During the 2005 Legislative Session, the General Assembly amended Virginia Code Section 2.2-221.1 instructing the Secretary of Public Safety to “establish an integrated system for coordinating the planning and provision of offender transitional and Reentry Services...”
- Department of Corrections has recently begun to establish Reentry Services within its institutions; we encourage them to continue to collaborate with the existing Reentry Services programs when possible to avoid duplication.
- The Governor’s Task Force on Offender Reentry has initiated proposals to address reentry. We encourage a structure that focuses on capacity building through already existing programs and the inclusion of partners such as faith based programs. We discourage spending funds on start-up and administration costs that could be avoided by using existing Reentry Services programs
- In order to avoid duplication and to support faith based and community based reentry assistance, coalition members will provide technical assistance to those groups for capacity building, legal liability issues, formation of partnerships with other social service agencies, sustainability and evaluation.

Request

- \$2.6 million for each year of the upcoming biennium
 - \$2.1 million will be used to fund programs and a program evaluation study
 - \$500,000 will be used for capacity building activities with other Reentry Services providers, including faith based organizations

For additional information regarding Offender Transition and Reentry Services programs in the Commonwealth, please contact Ralph L. “Bill” Axselle, Jr. (804) 783-6405, (baxselle@williamsmullen.com) or Travis G. Hill (804) 783-6437, (thill@williamsmullen.com).

