



**CY
VANCE
FOR
DA**

A PLAN TO REDUCE RECIDIVISM: ENHANCING REENTRY SERVICES

Under his **Plan to Reduce Recidivism: Enhancing Reentry Services**, Cy Vance will look beyond the courtroom for opportunities to reduce crime and enhance public safety. One particularly effective method is to ensure safe, effective reentry into the community for newly-released prisoners.

Individuals who have been incarcerated often enter penal institutions with significant social, financial and psychological problems. When they reenter society, these issues are typically unaddressed and are compounded by the stigma of a prison term. These problems can include chemical dependencies, physical or psychological difficulties, practical challenges such as housing and transportation, insufficient support networks and inadequate education, vocational training, parenting and life skills.¹

Cy Vance will build on the efforts of District Attorney Robert Morgenthau, who launched the *Fair Chance Initiative* in 2008 in cooperation with the renowned and highly successful *Ready, Willing & Able* program, *The Fortune Society*, *Addicts Rehabilitation Center* and more than a dozen other local reentry service providers.

What follows is Cy Vance's overall philosophy that guided the development of his prisoner reentry plan, as well as four specific areas where he will take immediate action as Manhattan District Attorney.

Overall Philosophy

The Manhattan District Attorney's office is much more than a vehicle to prosecute wrongdoing and root out criminal behavior. It is also an office that can work with community based organizations proactively to prevent crime. The strategies below are consistent with Cy Vance's fundamental vision for the DA's office:

- ***Crime Prevention and Crime Reduction:*** In New York State, of the 26,000² individuals released each year from state prisons, approximately 4,500 return to Manhattan.³ Approximately 38 percent of these individuals are re-incarcerated within three years.⁴ In addition, prior to their repeal, the Rockefeller Drug Laws ballooned our state prison population by imposing long mandatory sentences on non-violent drug offenders who are now returning to our communities by

¹ National District Attorneys Association, *Policy Positions on Prisoner Reentry Issues, Resolution Adopted by the Board of Directors* (2005) p. 2

² NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services, *Offender Reentry: 2006 Crimestat Update*, (February 8, 2007)

³ NYS Division of Parole, *Characteristics of All Parolees in Intensive and Regular Parole in Manhattan II, III, IV and all Manhattan Parole Bureaus. A snap-shot of parolees under supervision as of March 31, 2008.*

⁴ *2002 Releases: Three Year Post Release Follow-Up, NYS Department of Correctional Services*

the thousands. These individuals often lack necessary job skills and face myriad socio-economic challenges that also include the stigma of a felony conviction. Without housing, employment and support services, former inmates are left with few options when they leave prison, putting them at increased risk of recidivism. New York's prisoner reentry provider community has shown that safe and effective prisoner reentry programs can close this "revolving door" and significantly improve public safety by preventing new crimes from being committed.

- ***Focus on underserved segments of the population:*** There are three segments of the returning offender population which are traditionally underserved by existing reentry programs: parolees with a statutorily defined violent crime in their history, probationers from county and city jail, and young offenders coming out of Riker's Island. The existing *Fair Chance Initiative* reaches out to parolees with a violent conviction who might otherwise slip through the cracks of existing reentry service providers upon their return to Manhattan, and works with parole boards to identify qualified candidates for inclusion. Cy Vance would expand this program to include probationers coming out of jail and young offenders to create positive environments and support networks to help keep them from reoffending.
- ***Effectively use limited resources:*** The cost of the criminal justice system has skyrocketed, diverting funds from important social and educational programs. In 2007, New York State spent \$2.6 billion on its correction system, accounting for over 5 percent of its general fund.⁵ In addition, the secondary economic costs of recidivism are significant, as neither inmates nor unemployed parolees pay taxes or add to the economy. Imprisonment depresses wages and relegates these individuals to lower-paying jobs with less security and economic mobility, reducing economic growth and further eroding the tax base. By focusing limited resources on prisoner reentry, we will save the expense of police response, prosecution, and of course, incarceration.
- ***Consider Far-Reaching Implications:*** The children and families of offenders and repeat offenders suffer continuing economic and social repercussions. Most men incarcerated in New York have at least one child.⁶ Research indicates that while in prison, inmates are unlikely to pay child support⁷ and fathers out of jail without jobs or employment prospects are typically unable to make back – or current – payments. By investing in prisoner reentry efforts and providing recent releases with employment opportunities, we can help these men become responsible parents and role models to their children.

Solutions

New York City has prisoner reentry programs that have proven over the years that criminal recidivism is anything but a foregone conclusion. Several Manhattan reentry programs participated in District Attorney Morgenthau's *Fair Chance Initiative*, which Cy Vance would expand dramatically. One of these partners, the *Ready, Willing & Able* program, is best known for its "men in blue" who work hard cleaning more than 150 miles of New York City streets and sidewalks every day. The program's success rate speaks for itself: whereas 44 percent of the nation's newly released individuals are rearrested within the first year of their release, for those who complete the *Ready, Willing & Able* program, that number falls below 5 percent.

⁵ Warren, Jennifer, p.11

⁶ State of New York Department of Correctional Services

⁷ See, e.g., Thoennes, Dr. Nancy, *Child Support Profile: Massachusetts Incarcerated and Paroled Parent* (Denver: Center for Policy Research, May 2002)

Specific elements of our plan include:

1. Creation of a Cabinet-Level Reentry Director

As DA, Cy Vance will assign a deputy to oversee the development, implementation, oversight and expansion of the current reentry program. This cabinet-level officer will work with the foundations, organizations, corrections agencies and other governmental agencies to coordinate a comprehensive strategy; develop protocols for pre-release screenings of incarcerated individuals to determine eligibility for the reentry program; determine what elements of program and services are necessary for greatest likelihood of success; coordinate with state and local corrections authorities for prerelease training; and collect data to analyze the success of the program. The position will be responsible for the successful reintegration of former offenders into the community and will supervise the Alternatives to Incarceration program.

2. Comprehensive discharge planning and immediate engagement

Timely delivery of services is critical. Given that 30 percent of the formerly incarcerated are rearrested within six months of release, and over 40 percent within one year, there is a narrow window of opportunity to reach newly released inmates. Providing services concurrent with release is particularly effective, “especially for ex-offenders with drug and alcohol addictions, who, removed from the controlled environment of prison and confronted with multiple opportunities to re-engage in substance abuse, may quickly fall on the road to re-entry.”⁸ The Manhattan DA’s office under Cy Vance will partner directly with state and city corrections agencies, expanding on the relationships already developed by existing service providers. Relationships with such service providers will begin while individuals are still incarcerated as part of comprehensive discharge screening and planning.

3. Promote paid, transitional employment immediately upon release

Research shows that lack of quality employment is the chief factor in recidivism.⁹ Nearly 90 percent of parole and probation violators are unemployed at the time of re-arrest.¹⁰ More than half of New York City parolees are unemployed.¹¹ Studies also indicate that workforce programs for recent parolees whose clients remain employed longer recidivate at a lower rate.¹² Therefore, through service provider partners we will work to promote paid, transitional employment to those who demonstrate a sincere desire to succeed.

4. Ensure comprehensive “wraparound” services that meet former inmates’ needs upon release

In conjunction with the paid transitional employment described above, Cy Vance’s plan includes providing former offenders with a comprehensive array of services through our provider partners. This combination of services proved to be a success in the Kings County District Attorney’s Community and Law Enforcement Resources Together (ComALERT) program, as confirmed in an independent evaluation by noted Harvard sociologist Dr. Bruce Western. In addition to transitional housing, such services should include:

- a. Drug treatment, sobriety maintenance, and relapse prevention services

⁸ Kellam, Leslie, *Releases: Three Year Post Release Follow Up* (New York: State of New York Department of Correctional Services, 2001).

⁹ New York State Bar Association Special Committee on Collateral Consequences of Criminal Proceedings, *Re-Entry and Reintegration: The Road to Public Safety*

¹⁰ New York State Department of Labor, *The Prime Objective: A Guide in Preparing the Job Seeking Ex-Offender*.

¹¹ *Parolee Characteristics*, NYS Division of Parole (Mar. 2007)

¹² Albright, Shelley and Denq, Furjen, Employer Attitudes Toward Hiring Ex-Offenders, *The Prison Journal*, 1996, no. 2, pp. 118 - 137.

- b. Educational assistance – ranging from pre-GED to college preparation where appropriate, as well as substantial computer skills classes that will provide intensive training and workforce preparation.
- c. Financial Literacy – which will help participants not only manage their earned income, but plan for the future as well.
- d. Life Skills – classes that teach anger management and conflict resolution skills.

Furthermore, through our provider partners, Cy's office will recommend and promote career counseling and lifetime services for those who complete provider programs. Career development specialists will make job retention their priority, beginning with helping program participants find appropriate jobs that have opportunities for advancement. Once they have secured outside employment, Graduate Service Advisors will monitor their progress and help them develop plans for advancement.

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