

The Road to Rehabilitation: Reducing Recidivism in Maryland

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Executive Summary

Access to employment, housing, and education inhibit Maryland's ex-offenders from fully reintegrating into society, increasing their likelihood of recidivism and costing the state millions of dollars. The prison system should deter future criminal activity, so it is necessary to evaluate how Maryland's criminal justice system can continue to develop. It can become a national model of excellence by employing common sense solutions that affect the lives of ex-offenders and citizens alike.

One way to address recidivism is by taking preventative measures for "at risk" youth through a state funded preschool program that provides socially comprehensive educational services to impoverished families. Another recommendation is to integrate an in-prison educational programming course into Maryland's correctional facilities to teach computer literacy, information technology, and coding. Lastly, the state should seek to engage the social needs of ex-offenders immediately following their release from prison through a safe halfway house reentry program that provides wraparound services for ex offenders to reestablish their lives in society.

When all three policies are employed together, this program effectively considers an offender's life, before, during, and after incarceration to more accurately target and minimize the problem of recidivism. By combating this phenomenon in Maryland, we can achieve a more prosperous state and provide better lives to many of the citizens in our state.

Introduction

Last year the Maryland General Assembly renewed efforts to reduce recidivism and cut exorbitant costs plaguing the prison system. The Justice Reinvestment Coordinating Council (JRCC) gathered and analyzed data on the state's incarceration and parole practices. In their final

report, the JRCC found “adding months and years on to prison stays has little or no impact on recidivism. Still, recidivism in the Maryland prison system costs the state millions” (Justice Reinvestment Coordinating Council, 2015). In the opinion of the JRCC, rehabilitation of ex offenders produces a significantly better result than the current criminal justice model. Money saved by these reform practices could be reinvested efficiently to reap greater returns for ex offenders and the Maryland economy.

Our goal is to invest in programs designed to reintegrate ex offenders back into society. The Urban Institute found that “once released from prison, 48% of inmates wanted to, but were unable to participate in programs to improve their work skills, most commonly because they were unaware of program availability” (Visher, 2016). The percent that were legally employed before prison was 61%; after incarceration only 30% were legally employed (Visher, 2016). The rehabilitative services highlighted in this paper make sure ex offenders aren’t overlooked by the government or set up for failure upon release. High rates of recidivism will continue to burden the state unless these programs are funded and successfully executed.

The JRCC found that the average length of a first sentence rate has risen 25% over the last ten years; this trend costs the state and offenders more than any perceived benefits (Justice Reinvestment Coordinating Council, 2015). We propose the state grant parole earlier when possible and use the money saved to invest in preschool education programs, skills training for inmates in prison, and reentry safehouse programs. Lower sentences and reconsideration for nonviolent offenders may be necessary to find the funding for these programs. Nonviolent drug offenses are big in Maryland, but their recidivism rates are incredibly high because prison exacerbates the risk factors leading to recidivism. Treatment and supervision should be assigned instead of incarceration on a case by case basis.

These general administrative strategies follow the precedent Governor John Kasich set in Ohio of favoring rehabilitation in sentencing. Maryland is one of around 30 states in the process of passing the same legislation. The prison reform strategies we propose here are necessary all across the country. We believe Maryland is poised to lead on this issue.

Problem definition

Recidivism is a criminal act resulting in either rearrest, reconviction or returning to prison with or without a new sentence during a three-year period following the prisoner's initial release (National Institute of Justice, 2008). Studying recidivism gives policymakers and criminal justice administrators an opportunity to evaluate whether previously established sanctions and rehabilitative programs are effective in deterring repeat offenses.

The economic burden of recidivism creates undue imposition on the state and the lives of its residents. It has been reported that 40% of all ex-offenders recidivate within 3 years of committing an initial crime, not including individuals who commit federal offenses and are held in federal prisons. It costs the state approximately \$38,000 per year to incarcerate an individual and \$1 billion dollars to maintain correctional facilities (Basu, 2015).

In addition to explicit costs, opportunity costs are also incurred from a high rate of recidivism. Individuals cycling through criminal justice system are rendered unable to contribute gainfully to the formal economy of Maryland, or establish a substantive foundation for finding work.

Origins

The initial act of committing a crime, as any subsequent arrests have complex sociological origins. Social factors like education, familial support, and proper modeling of prosocial behavior decrease one's propensity toward offending (“Causes of Crime - Social and

Economic Factors,” 2007). Addressing these factors can significantly reduce anti-social behaviors. These findings have been echoed by ex offenders, who argued that lack of mentorship and job opportunities were significant hindrances to gainful employment (Paul’s Place, Personal Communication, 2016). It is important that policy makers, criminal justice personnel, and community stakeholders address factors associated with antisocial behavior and recidivism.

A Norwegian study on employment and recidivism discovered that in their country employment had a negative correlation with recidivism of ex-offenders (Skardhamar and Telle, 2012). Another study on recidivism rates and employment of American inmates from 2005 to 2009 revealed that recidivism rates consistently ranged from one third to more than one half of all ex-offenders, regardless of the type of crime they committed (Nally et al, 2014). They concluded that the greatest predictor of recidivism was employment status, and that most offenders who were returned to prison did so within the first twelve months of initial release because they could not find employment (Nally et al, 2014).

Recidivism can also be seen as the product of learned maladaptive behaviors, which need to be restructured in order for individuals to change. Factors leading to recidivism, like economic barriers and insufficient social supports lead individuals to adapt ways to compensate, such as larceny and the distribution of controlled substances. The social stigma associated with criminal conviction inhibits individuals from being able to reintegrate into society at the same level as their peers, developing adverse social consequences.

Current efforts

The Justice Reinvestment Coordinating Council hosted experts from reentry services, prosecutorial and defense bars, local and state corrections, law enforcement, and representatives from the judiciary on its board during a yearlong investigation into the Maryland criminal justice

system. Divided into three subgroups to address sentencing, reentry, and supervision, the council found a series of comprehensive policies necessary to the reduction of recidivism and the general inmate population. Some considerations include expanding reentry program funding, more oversight of restitution monies, requiring training for criminal justice decision-makers, and eliminating mandatory measurements for all drug offences.

The The Education and Workforce Training Coordinating Council for Correctional Institutions (EWTCCCI) report showed that Maryland is currently taking many important steps towards educating inmates and preparing them for employment and life after release. Through partnerships with the state's community colleges and education programs, correctional facilities offer courses that allow Maryland inmates to earn degrees and certificates, such as GEDs or occupational credentials (EWTCCCI, 2015). Furthermore, the state holds seminars and classes on life skills intended to help inmates prepare for the transition out of prison (EWTCCCI, 2015). The correctional institutions also work with nonprofits like Vehicles for Change and Second Chance Maryland to train inmates and ex-offenders skills such as construction and automotive repair, preparing them for employment at those nonprofits often as construction workers and mechanics after they are released from prison (EWTCCCI, 2015). But despite these promising programs currently in place more can be done to prepare Maryland's ex-offenders for the jobs of the future.

Policy Alternatives, Analysis, and Implementation

First Alternative: Early Education Intervention

Policy that addresses recidivism after the first offense may not start early enough in the life of an ex-offender. Ex-offenders face difficulty obtaining housing and community support when starting their lives over again upon re entry. Additionally, for some men and women

transitional programs and rehabilitative services for ex offenders may be too little, too late for a demographic whose only job experience is what landed them in prison in the first place. In order to fully address the root issues of recidivism, the smartest course of action may be to propose a program designed to alleviate recidivism before the first offense.

To understand the issue of recidivism and community in Baltimore, a predominantly African American city, one must understand the effects of race and racism in this issue. The US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights biennially collects data early on in the lives of American students relating to school discipline practices and any associated effects. Data in this issue brief suggests harsh disciplinary practices unfairly target African American children. The data compiled here by the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) indicates correlation between systemic targeting of minority children by school disciplinary practices and an increase in prison sentencing for said minority groups. If certain racial groups are disciplined more severely than their peers, an argument can be made that this institutional disadvantage for blacks may contribute to the racial divide in America. Considering they are targeted as early as in preschool, it's no wonder these minority groups make up such a large percentage of Maryland's incarcerated population.

Implementing a state funded preschool program depends on providing socially comprehensive educational services to impoverished families. The program would be modeled after Head Start or Child-Parent Center Education Program, federal preschool programs that have gone underfunded in Maryland over the past decade, with many of the same social objectives we are proposing here. Our program would be focused on personal, interactive education that, starting at the age of three, develops young people socially and emotionally. This program would maximize the amount of time that preschoolers get working with adult

instructors. It would create a positive, nurturing environment for relationships between students and mentors to develop. With this foundation in place, charting the progress of these students has already proven to be possible. The Chicago Longitudinal Study, a study from the University of Minnesota investigates the link between early involvement in preschool and well roundedness later in life (CLS; Reynolds, 1991, 1999; Reynolds, Bezruczko, Hagemann, 1997). The authors investigate the livelihood of nearly 1,000 adults after they were brought up in the Child-Parent Center (CPC) Education Program. The regression analyses proved that the group of children who attended preschool achieved higher educational attainment, economic status, occupational prestige, and health insurance coverage. Most importantly, the preschool group had lower rates of felonies and crime involvement than their comparison control groups. The effects of CPC education were most impactful when immersion into the preschool environment occurred at age three. Modeling our Head Start/CPC Education-style program this way will be beneficial to economically disadvantaged children, hopefully setting them on a trajectory that is clear of justice involvement or arrests.

Second Alternative: Vocational Training

We interviewed a group of ex offenders who had found work after prison at Paul's Place, a soup kitchen in Baltimore. A common theme they expressed was the perception that Maryland's criminal justice system as a whole and on the institutional level overemphasizes deterrence and punishment, but fails to engage in adequate rehabilitative efforts. The individuals at Paul's Place agreed that lack of education is an additional barrier to attaining post-release employment. Scholars in Maryland and the United States found two factors that are highly influential on recidivism rates: education and employment.

In her article published in a 2015 issue of the Journal of Correctional Education, Virginia Tech researcher Lori Hall contested that education dramatically reduced recidivism (Hall, 2015). Hall compiled and comprehensively reviewed the findings of ten prominent American studies from the past two decades which related to education and recidivism; the studies “unanimously concluded that correctional education, particularly college or academic, has a negative correlation with recidivism” (Hall, 2015). She argued that static recidivism rates were a consequence of the systematic defunding of “rehabilitative programs” and that “gainful employment [had a] direct link to recidivism reduction,” supporting the beliefs of the ex-offenders we interviewed (Hall, 2015). One of the studies Hall discussed was a report to the US Department of Education written by Steurer, Smith, and Tracy where they revealed that participants in education programs in a Maryland correctional facility reported six percent lower re-incarceration rates than those who did not participate (Steurer, Smith, and Tracy, 2001).

Finding any form of employment, let alone stable employment with livable wages, is crucial for reentering citizens. The interviews we conducted at Paul’s Place revealed an overwhelming consensus of the ex-offenders we spoke to viewed employment as the greatest barrier to overcome after being released from prison. One man said that even if he was able to find an interview, acquire suitable clothing for the interview, and construct a presentable resume, his status as an ex-offender led to problematic applications and interviews. The specific obstacle of employment discrimination based on a previous offense was partially addressed in Maryland under the O’Malley administration when the former governor signed legislation to prohibit state applications from having questions regarding previous criminal history. Similarly, some localities such as the City of Baltimore have “banned the box” by preventing businesses from asking questions about an individual’s criminal record on an initial job application (Hafets,

2014). But despite such progress, finding employment remains a serious challenge for most ex-offenders.

Relevant literature supports his perception about the difficulty of attaining employment and its relation to recidivism. In her article in defense of hiring ex-offenders, Stacy Hickox utilized a legal approach to argue that the legal system is shaped to broadly discriminate against ex-offenders instead of being one that handles the hiring of ex-offenders on a case by case basis, which she argues perpetuates a process that keeps recidivism rates high (Hickox, 2016). These studies led us to question: if employment opportunities are a barrier to ex-offenders, what job markets in Maryland would they find luck applying for? The answer was technology. If manufacturing and construction declined in the recession like Nally suggested, then the tech industry was one of the few industries that actually saw growth. According to the state government, "In 2015, Maryland was ranked third in the nation in "Innovation & Entrepreneurship" by the U.S. Department of Commerce in its annual *Enterprising States* report (Maryland Economy). In recent articles published in the past two years by both the Washington Post and USA Today, the Capitol region of DC, Maryland, and Virginia has a growing and diverse computer technology market (Censer and Tankersley, 2014; Snider, 2014).

The literature exhibited a clear negative relationship between the presence of educational programs, and recidivism rates. Therefore, educational employment programs within Maryland correctional institutions became a central focus of our research to reduce recidivism across the state. Through a joint partnership, the Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulations and the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services established the Education and Workforce Training Coordinating Council for Correctional Institutions (EWTCCCI). According to the council's 2015 report, EWTCCCI is legally obligated

to report on the activities of the council under state law (EWTCCCI, 2015). Additionally, the report stated the “[recidivism] rate is at the lowest rate in fifteen years, 40.5% (EWTCCCI, 2015).

One program recently in place in Maryland facilities taught small groups of inmates how to use computers. The program was funded by the Second Chance Career Technology grant and helped establish a temporary program in the state to educate certain inmates on computer literacy (EWTCCCI, 2015). The program also partnered ex-offenders with certain businesses and nonprofits like Our Daily Bread in Baltimore where they worked as paid interns operating office technology. The program, according to the report, reduced recidivism and increased post-release employment (EWTCCCI, 2015). Another program in California taught inmates of all different ages who had never used computers before how to program (Guynn, 2014). The California program taught entry level web development and computer programming skills that not only prepared ex-offenders for the Silicon Valley’s job market, but helped them gain confidence (Guynn, 2014). Maryland’s use of the Second Chance Career Technology grant taught ex-offenders many marketable skills and assisted several in gaining meaningful post-release employment, but the program had limited funding and did not teach programming skills like the one in California, a skill that could potentially help ex-offenders tap into the relevant capital region tech market after release.

In light of our findings, our policy suggestion to further reduce the recidivism rate in Maryland is to permanently establish computer literacy and programming classes at Maryland’s correctional facilities. While the aforementioned Second Chance Career Technology grant provided necessary funding to teach and certify inmates, “[it] was a one-time competitive grant award of \$645,552 from the Bureau of Justice to DLLR - Correctional Education,” and was

limited in scope and impermanent (EWTCCCI, 2015). The progress from that program and the limited number of programs that similarly introduced inmates to computer technology was undeniable. Thus, our policy aims to build upon it by providing similar opportunities for years to come through more stable state funding instead of competitive and term-limited grants. By emphasizing computer programming education and office computer literacy, such as excel and word, we believe our policy can teach inmates to be prepared for the necessary computer literacy for today's workforce and compete in Maryland's growing tech market.

Permanently establishing computer literacy and programming classes in state correctional facilities is not without challenges. The tech grant that enabled the state to explore with technology education in previous years within state correctional facilities was nearly three quarters of a million dollars, a large sum of money that helped cover everything from the cost of computers, to the hiring of staff and teachers, as well as general program management. The high cost of the program was sustainable almost entirely because of grant funding. In order to permanently establish these programs in state facilities, the state would need to permanently hire programming teachers, maintain overhead for computer labs and equipment, and potentially pay costly fees for curriculum material, without grant funding much of that burden would fall on Maryland taxpayers. The overall cost would need to be further investigated, however, investment in rehabilitative efforts and successful computer education like that seen in California and the Second Chance Career Technology grant demonstrates the cost of these programs can be worth the economic effect of a workforce of employed ex-offenders.

Third Alternative: Transitional & Supportive Housing

Every year, thousands of inmates are released from prison. Many of these ex-convicts have no viable release plan, wind up becoming homeless and eventually go back to prison.

According to Vera's Center on Sentencing and Corrections and its Cost-Benefit Analysis Unit, it costs the state of Maryland around 836.2 million dollars to fund state correctional facilities. We have explored policies that combat prison through early education before prison and professional development in prison. Now we will look at the biggest socio-economic issue that hinders the reintegration of ex-offenders after prison: housing.

One thing that research suggests is that stable housing greatly contributes to recidivism rates. Research suggests that, on average, about 10 percent of parolees are homeless immediately following their release (Moraff 2014). In large urban areas, and among those addicted to drugs, the number is even higher — exceeding 30 percent (Moraff 2014). This poses a problem to reintegration. Without a stable, safe place to live, ex-offenders will only be focused on surviving the night instead of securing a future in the professional job market. Therefore, addressing the problem of homelessness among ex-convicts will help lower recidivism in the long term by helping them successfully reintegrate into society.

A study recently published in *Criminal Justice and Behavior* found that certain individuals released from prison without a place to live and who participated in a housing program had lower rates of recidivism compared to individuals under similar circumstances who did not participate in housing programs. One example of these “housing programs” is the Washington State Reentry Housing Pilot Program, or RHPP. RHPP provided up to 12 months of housing with wraparound services to high-risk/need individuals being released from prison without viable housing (Center for Health and Justice, 2014). Wraparound services refers to an intensive, individualized care planning and management process that will help ex-offenders by providing a structured environment that enables them to develop prosocial skills (Bruns, Sutter 2010). After a 12 month follow up outcome evaluation researchers compared recidivism results

of those who received the RHPP intervention with similar individuals at risk of homelessness who did not receive the intervention in the three years following release; 22% of RHPP participants had a new conviction vs. 36% of the comparison group. Similarly, 37% of RHPP participants had been readmitted to prison vs. 56% of the comparison group (Lutze, Rosky, Hamilton 2013). Clearly there is an apparent correlation between homelessness and recidivism.

Implementing a program like the Reentry Housing Pilot Program in the state of Maryland would help lower recidivism rates in Maryland and allow the state to allocate its limited resources to other state programs instead of having to contribute so heavily to state-run correctional facilities. Ideally, if a housing program similar to the RHPP were executed in Maryland, it would be most effective if it were implemented in counties with a high population of ex-offenders. By implementing in counties with a high population of ex-offenders, it would be more facile to observe and analyze the effectiveness of the program. There would be case management partnerships with local agencies so that the program can effectively target the different needs of different jurisdictions. Additionally, the program would be operated in collaboration with Maryland's Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services. The general purpose of the program would be to provide up to 12 months of housing support to qualified offenders who are willing to engage in treatment, employment programs, and overall strive towards self-sustainability. (Lutze, Rosky, Falconer, 2011). Apart from providing housing, the program itself would also provide "wraparound services" to ex-convicts, including services that address treatment, employment, education, and welfare. This program would also encourage information sharing and inter agency collaboration between social services, mental health services, and substance abuse services.

The main practical issue facing a housing program in Maryland is the issue of funding. The state would need to allocate funds from the annual budget to develop the housing and/or the services or the state would need to find some sort of federal grant that would aid them in the provision of services and construction. By providing a stable and safe place to reside in, ex-offenders can focus on their own professional development and mental and physical wellbeing. By living in a state-run facility, the likelihood of ex-convicts or parolees reoffending or getting into any unlawful and dangerous situation is significantly lowered. As can be seen in the Washington model of a reentry housing pilot program, the data proves that there is a correlation between homelessness and recidivism. We urge the state of Maryland to put this program on its agenda. This program will help improve the outcome of ex-convicts and parolees' and help them become functioning members of society.

Conclusion

Prison reform was hotly debated by the Maryland General Assembly last year, the effects of Maryland's current incarceration practices were analyzed, and key legislation was passed. Often times a state assembly can focus on several big issues when drafting legislation, talk them through, and then put them back on the shelf after a compromise has been passed. There is still much more work that needs to be done for prison reform. The Justice Reinvestment Coordinating Council highlighted important issues the state faces if it wants to keep moving forward with prison reform, and it offered some potentially innovative guidelines on how to do so. But our team believes not enough attention is being paid to people in the community who become victims of the prison system, either by losing a family member to prison or getting sucked into the cycle of poverty that goes hand in hand with prison. Our team members are strong believers in the ideal that to reform prison, we need to build the communities affected by prison too.

That's why our policy alternatives take a fresh look at reentry strategies that benefit both the community and the ex offender.

Setting up these ex offenders for success means giving them the support system they need to navigate the transition from prison to the work force, and the most important support system for us is family and community. Safe houses and skills training in prison make sure ex offenders have something to offer upon release. Preschool programs are proven investments early in life that lead to success down the road. These programs teach people who may not come from the same background how to work with different people, navigate the real world, and offer a new perspective. 2015 was the year Maryland tried to engineer a more financially solvent prison system. Now that state legislatures have investigated the books, they should be able to move on to programs that are designed to help the people of Maryland.

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