Prisoner Reentry: National Trends and Challenges

26th Wisconsin Family Impact Seminar “Looking Beyond the Prison Gate: New Directions in Prisoner Reentry”

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Key Points about Prisoner Reentry

- More people are leaving prison
- Returning prisoners are less prepared for reentry
- Diminished capacity to support reentry
- Significant challenges facing returning prisoners
- Consequences for communities and families
More People are Leaving Prison
More than 600,000 Released in 2000

Sentenced Prisoners Admitted and Released from Federal and State Prison, 1977-2000

Prison Admissions
Prison Releases
Costs Are High

Public Safety Risks
• 67% rearrested within 3 years (30% within 6 months)
• 47% reconvicted for new crime within 3 years
• 25% reincarcerated for new crime within 3 years

Fiscal Implications
• $44B on corrections in 1999 - up from $9B in 1982

Social Costs
• public health, homelessness, disenfranchisement, social capital
Prisoners are Less Prepared for Reentry

Prison Program Participation Rates are Down

Prisoners to be Released in the Next 12 Months: Percent Participating in Prison Programs, 1991 and 1997

Challenges for Reentry

Substance Abuse
Health (Physical and Mental)
Employment
Housing

→ high prevalence of problem
→ some in-prison intervention
→ evidence of intervention effectiveness
→ few linkages to aftercare
Most Prisoners Have History of Substance Abuse

- 74% of “soon-to-be-released” prisoners have substance abuse problem
- 18% participate in formal treatment in-prison
- Studies show treatment is a cost-effective way to reduce both drug use and criminal activity
High Rates of Infectious Disease and Mental Illness among State Prisoners

Public health opportunity

• 2-3% are HIV+/AIDS
  - 5-7 times greater than US population

• 18% are infected with hepatitis C
  - 9-10 times greater than US population

• 8-16% have serious mental health disorder
  - 2-4 times higher than US population
Returning Prisoners Have Difficulty Finding Employment

• Having a job is associated with lower rates of reoffending

• Job training and placement programs can help
  – Improve the odds of getting a job and lower recidivism

• Yet
  – Insufficient job training and work opportunities in prison
  – Most returning prisoners unemployed
Housing is an Immediate Barrier

- Private housing market challenges include money, time, and references
- Public housing challenges include federal laws, which bar certain individuals
- Risk of homelessness
Implications for Families

• 1.5 million children with incarcerated parents (prison only)

• Majority under 10 years old

• Disproportionate impact on children of color

• Consequences for
  – child care, custody and parental rights
  – child development and child welfare
  – family violence
  – future criminality of children

Minor Children with Incarcerated Parents, 1999

- African American: 7%
- Hispanic: 2.60%
- European-American: 0.08%

Implications for Communities

Concentrations

Returning prisoners concentrated in few neighborhoods

Brooklyn example

- 1 out of 8 parenting-age males is admitted to jail or prison in a single year in some neighborhoods

- 11% of the city blocks in Brooklyn account for 20% of the population but 50% of the parolees

Social Capital

- Increased incarceration destabilizes social networks, and leads to increases in crime?