

# REENTRY IN AMERICA

*National Trends, Best Programs, and a Practitioner's Guide to Starting and Scaling*

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## Abstract

More than 600,000 people are released from state and federal prisons every year in the United States. Millions more cycle through local jails. Each release is an inflection point. It is either the beginning of a genuine second chance or the first step back toward the revolving door. Which direction that person goes depends enormously on the systems, programs, and human relationships waiting for them on the other side of the gate.

This paper examines the national landscape of reentry: where we have been, where we are now, and what the data tell us about what actually works. It profiles exemplary programs from across the country, reviews the policy infrastructure driving current momentum, and provides a practitioner's framework for those looking to build or grow a reentry program in their own community. The perspective here is not purely academic. It is grounded in lived experience inside the system and years of community-based work serving the people that policy documents too often reduce to data points.

## I. Introduction: The Scale of the Challenge

Reentry is not a niche issue. It is a defining feature of American civic life. On any given day, the United States holds roughly 2 million people in prisons and jails, the largest incarcerated population in the world. The majority of those people will come home. They will come home to neighborhoods that may have changed, to families that weathered their absence, to labor markets that view criminal records as a permanent scarlet letter, and to social service systems that are chronically underfunded and often poorly coordinated.

The statistics are both familiar and sobering. The unemployment rate among formerly incarcerated people stands at approximately 27 percent, more than five times the national average. One in four returning citizens lacks a high school diploma, GED, or any college credential. Rates of housing insecurity among the formerly incarcerated exceed 5,700 per 100,000, a crisis of homelessness that intersects directly with recidivism. Probation and parole systems impose an average of 12 or more compliance requirements per day, any one of which can result in re-arrest, making successful reentry a bureaucratic obstacle course that has nothing to do with public safety.

At the same time, there is genuine reason for optimism. State-level reincarceration rates have fallen 23 percent since 2008, driven by policy reforms, increased investment in evidence-based programming, and a growing consensus that incarceration alone produces neither rehabilitation nor public safety. The field of reentry has matured. Researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and people with lived experience are working together at a scale that would have been unimaginable two decades ago.

This paper is a contribution to that work.

## II. National Trends: What the Data Tell Us

### A. Recidivism: The Baseline and Its Limits

The Bureau of Justice Statistics estimates that roughly 68 percent of state prisoners are rearrested within three years of release. Over a nine-year period, that number climbs to

approximately 83 percent. These figures are frequently cited as evidence of failure, but they require careful interpretation.

Recidivism, as typically measured, conflates vastly different outcomes. Rearrest, which produces the highest rates, includes arrests that result in no charges, misdemeanor violations, and technical parole or probation violations. In fact, more than half of all recidivism events are the result of technical supervision violations, not new criminal conduct. When researchers use more meaningful measures, such as conviction for a new crime or return to prison for a new sentence, rates fall substantially. The definition of recidivism is itself a policy and political choice, and that choice shapes how we understand whether programs are working.

More useful than the rearrest rate is the trend line. The Council of State Governments Justice Center, analyzing data across the Second Chance Act era, found that national reincarceration rates declined 23 percent between 2008 and 2019. That is not a marginal improvement. It represents hundreds of thousands of people who did not return to prison. It represents families that stayed intact, neighborhoods that remained stable, and corrections budgets that did not expand.

## **B. The Second Chance Act Era: A Policy Framework That Changed the Field**

The Second Chance Act, signed into law in 2008, marked a turning point in federal reentry policy. For the first time, the federal government made a sustained, bipartisan commitment to funding reentry programs at scale. From 2009 to 2024, the Department of Justice awarded more than 1,300 Second Chance Act grants to 871 state, local, territorial, and tribal governments, as well as reentry-focused nonprofits across 49 states. These grants have directly served more than 442,000 justice-involved individuals.

The Act was reauthorized in 2018. In 2025, the Second Chance Reauthorization Act passed the Senate with a bipartisan vote of 77-20 as an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act, extending program funding through 2030 and expanding allowable uses to include additional supportive housing and substance use disorder treatment services. The legislation's bipartisan durability, through administrations and political climates of very different orientations, speaks to the strength of the evidence and the breadth of stakeholder support.

## **C. Reentry 2030: A New Accountability Framework**

In 2023, the CSG Justice Center and the Bureau of Justice Assistance launched the Reentry 2030 initiative, a national effort inviting states to set bold, public, measurable goals for reentry outcomes by the end of the decade. The initiative operates on the premise that naming specific targets creates accountability and drives systems change in ways that general commitments do not.

Alabama exemplifies the Reentry 2030 approach. The state committed to reducing recidivism by 50 percent and increasing workforce development participation by 50 percent. In 2025, Governor Kay Ivey signed SB138, removing employment barriers for returning citizens, and established a statewide Reentry Task Force to coordinate implementation across state agencies. The task force includes legislators, corrections officials, local government representatives, members of the judiciary, community organizations, and, critically, people with lived experience in the criminal justice system.

North Carolina, Nebraska, and Missouri are among other states pursuing Reentry 2030 goals, each developing plans tailored to their specific populations, labor markets, and system

architectures. The initiative represents a structural shift away from program-level interventions toward whole-of-government approaches to reentry.

## **D. The Workforce Crisis and Second Chance Employment**

One of the most significant shifts in the reentry landscape over the past decade has been the growing engagement of the private sector. As labor markets tightened and workforce shortages became a strategic concern for businesses, employers began looking at the returning citizen population not as a liability but as an asset. Studies consistently show that employees with criminal records, when given a fair chance, demonstrate lower turnover and higher loyalty than the general workforce.

Fair Chance hiring, Ban the Box policies, and Work Opportunity Tax Credit programs have created infrastructure for employer engagement. More than 35 states have adopted some form of Ban the Box legislation limiting when employers can inquire about criminal history. Federal contractors operating with more than 50 employees are covered by federal Ban the Box requirements. The WOTC provides a federal tax credit of up to \$9,600 per hire for employers who bring on returning citizens and other target groups, an incentive that remains underutilized but is gaining traction as workforce development organizations build out technical assistance capacity.

Despite this progress, systemic barriers remain severe. Occupational licensing restrictions continue to block access to trades, healthcare, education, and other sectors for people with records. Hundreds of these restrictions remain on the books across states, some with no rational nexus to public safety and many reflecting legislative choices made decades ago.

## **E. The Housing Crisis: The Hardest Barrier**

Of all the barriers returning citizens face, housing may be the most intractable. Without stable housing, nearly every other reentry intervention is compromised. People cannot maintain employment without a stable address. They cannot parent effectively from shelter programs or the streets. They cannot manage mental health and substance use treatment without a stable environment. And they are vastly more likely to return to criminal activity when basic survival is not secured.

Formerly incarcerated people are excluded from most federally subsidized housing programs, including public housing and Section 8 vouchers, for periods ranging from three years to lifetime bans depending on the nature of the conviction. Many private landlords conduct background checks and categorically reject applicants with any criminal history. The result is that people leave prison with nowhere to go.

Research from the Loyola Chicago Center for Criminal Justice found that 28 percent of men and 42 percent of women nearing release from Illinois prisons had unmet housing needs at the point of release. Housing instability in the first days and weeks after release is among the strongest predictors of reincarceration. Programs that provide transitional housing, whether through halfway houses, host home models, or supported independent living, consistently outperform programs that provide services without housing support.

## **F. Mental Health, Substance Use, and Co-occurring Disorders**

A disproportionate share of the incarcerated population has co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders. Estimates suggest that between 60 and 70 percent of people in jails and prisons have diagnosable substance use disorders. Rates of serious mental illness in correctional settings run three to five times higher than in the general population. Post-

Incarceration Syndrome, the cluster of trauma symptoms associated with prolonged incarceration, remains underrecognized and undertreated.

The period immediately following release is a time of acute overdose risk. Research on opioid use disorder and post-release overdose finds that tolerance drops during incarceration, making the first two weeks after release among the most dangerous in a person's life. Medication-Assisted Treatment, naloxone access, and immediate linkage to community behavioral health services are not optional amenities for effective reentry programs. They are core public health infrastructure.

The 2025 Second Chance Reauthorization Act expanded allowable uses for substance use disorder treatment specifically in response to this evidence base, recognizing that reentry programs that do not address addiction are leaving the most vulnerable participants without the support they need to survive, let alone thrive.

### **III. Best Programs: What Good Looks Like**

#### **A. Evidence, Promise, and the Limits of Rigor**

The reentry field has a complicated relationship with the term 'evidence-based.' The gold standard for evidence, the randomized controlled trial, has rarely been applied to reentry programs at scale. The National Institute of Justice has noted that no reentry program strictly meets the definition of evidence-based as rigorously applied in medical research. This is a methodological limitation of the field, not an indication that programs are ineffective.

What the research does support clearly is a set of program elements and principles that consistently correlate with better outcomes. Programs that begin before release, address the full range of reintegration needs, match services to individual risk and need, build on participant strengths rather than treating people as problems to be managed, and provide sustained support over time produce better results than programs that do none of these things. The following programs reflect those principles in action.

#### **B. California Community Reentry Programs: Reducing Recidivism Through Holistic Support**

California's Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation operates both the Male Community Reentry Program and the Female Community Reentry Program, voluntary evidence-based programs for individuals with two years or less remaining on their sentence. Participants complete the remainder of their sentence in secure community-based facilities with access to substance use disorder treatment, employment readiness training, vocational programming, educational opportunities, healthcare connections, and family reunification support.

The results are striking. CDCR's overall three-year recidivism rate is 39.1 percent. For Male Community Reentry Program participants, the rate falls to 26.5 percent. For Female Community Reentry Program participants, it drops to 18.3 percent. Among participants in the Enhanced Alternative Custody Program, nearly 80 percent of women and 74 percent of men did not recidivate, rates 14 to 15 percentage points lower than comparable non-participants. California's investment in community reentry is producing measurable, replicable outcomes.

#### **C. Illinois Adult Transition Centers: Work Release That Works**

Illinois operates a network of Adult Transition Centers, community-based work release facilities designed to bridge the gap between incarceration and full community reintegration. A 2025 study using propensity score matching to control for selection effects found that ATC participation was associated with a 15.5 percent lower probability of rearrest and a 36.9 percent lower probability of reincarceration. Participants also experienced significantly longer periods before any post-release arrest, meaning that even when recidivism occurred, it was delayed and potentially reduced in severity.

The ATC model works because it integrates employment into the reentry process rather than treating it as an afterthought. Participants move toward legitimate work while still under supervision, building financial stability and employment history simultaneously. The model reflects what practitioners and researchers have long known: employment is not just an economic outcome for returning citizens. It is a protective factor, a source of identity and purpose, and a structural anchor for the entire reintegration process.

### **D. Root and Rebound: Legal Empowerment at Scale**

Root and Rebound is a California-based organization that addresses one of the most overlooked dimensions of reentry: legal barriers. Returning citizens face a dense thicket of collateral consequences, housing disqualifications, occupational licensing restrictions, public benefit exclusions, and family court obstacles, that can undermine every other reentry support. Root and Rebound provides legal information, direct services, and systemic advocacy to help people navigate these barriers.

The organization's impact is measurable. Surveys show that 94.5 percent of participants report feeling more confident about finding better employment opportunities after receiving services. Critically, the program affirms that 100 percent of participants believe their stories and potential have value, which speaks to the dignity-centered approach that distinguishes Root and Rebound from transactional service models. Legal empowerment, understanding one's rights and having support to exercise them, is a dimension of reentry support that is essential and chronically underfunded.

### **E. The Prison Fellowship Academy: Character Formation and Community**

The Prison Fellowship Academy operates a residential character formation program inside prisons, creating intensive communities of practice around values, responsibility, and civic engagement. The model operates on the premise that sustainable behavioral change requires more than skill training. It requires a transformation of identity, from someone whose life has been organized around survival or harm to someone who understands themselves as capable of contribution and belonging.

The evidence base for the Academy's outcomes is strongest in the areas of prosocial behavior, criminal thinking reduction, and prison culture. Studies document meaningful improvements in participants' values, self-perception, and institutional conduct. The evidence on post-release recidivism is more mixed: independent researchers have raised methodological concerns about how comparison groups are constructed in some outcome studies, and results vary across sites and populations. The Academy itself has moved toward a broader framework for measuring success, the Good Citizenship Model, which evaluates character development and community contribution alongside recidivism, a shift that reflects genuine intellectual honesty about what residential character formation programs can and should be held accountable for.

Faith-based reentry programming is one of the oldest and most widespread forms of reentry support in the United States. At its best, it provides something that government programs often cannot: unconditional community, a sense of worth that is not contingent on performance, and

long-term relational accountability. Prison Fellowship's alumni networks and its Warden Exchange initiative, which has trained more than 680 correctional leaders across 47 states, extend its influence well beyond individual participants.

## **F. Frederick Douglass Project: Restorative Dialogue Across the Divide**

The Frederick Douglass Project uses structured dialogue between incarcerated individuals and community members from outside the justice system, including students, professionals, and everyday citizens, to foster empathy, humanization, and rehabilitation. The program operates on the premise that proximity changes perception, and that a society more willing to see the humanity of incarcerated people is a society better equipped to support their successful reintegration.

The significance of the Frederick Douglass Project is what it represents about reentry as a community process. Successful reintegration is not something that happens to returning citizens in isolation. It happens in relationship, through the willingness of communities to extend recognition, accountability, and belonging to people who have caused harm. Programs that build those relational bridges are doing work that no case management system or job training curriculum can replicate.

## **G. New Freedom: Arizona's Behavioral Health Reentry Model**

New Freedom, located in Phoenix, Arizona, represents one of the most comprehensive and innovative reentry program models in the country. Operating on a hotel-style campus converted into a behavioral health haven, New Freedom integrates clinical treatment with intensive reentry support in a way that few programs have achieved at comparable scale. The organization is recognized as one of the largest reentry programs in the United States and holds a contract with the Arizona Department of Corrections, Rehabilitation and Reentry to bring substance use treatment directly inside correctional facilities before release.

New Freedom's core reentry program spans 90 days and structures each weekday around therapeutic groups, peer mentoring, physical wellness, and skills development. Participants have access to vocational training, employment placement assistance, housing, transportation, meals, GED support, and ID recovery services. Upon release, assigned peer mentors are waiting at the gate to greet and transport members directly to the New Freedom campus, eliminating the dangerous gap between release and first contact with services that is among the most predictive factors for early recidivism.

What distinguishes New Freedom as a national model is its in-reach approach. Rather than waiting for people to come out of prison and find their way to services, New Freedom's letter-writing and peer mentorship program initiates relationships with incarcerated individuals years before release, including those serving long sentences. Peer Support Specialists, all of whom are navigating their own recovery and reentry, are embedded throughout the program, providing daily guidance grounded in shared experience rather than institutional authority.

New Freedom's partnership with Gold Canyon Heart and Home, a nonprofit with a 17-year track record in peer-to-peer reentry programming, provides an additional layer of community-rooted support. Of the original 140-plus peer mentors developed through that partnership who have been released, none have recidivated. They collectively helped more than 4,200 men and women successfully reenter the community. New Freedom is not just a strong Arizona program. It is proof of concept for what behavioral health-centered, peer-driven, in-reach reentry looks like at scale.

## H. Principles of Effective Programs: A Synthesis

Across the programs reviewed and the broader evidence base, several principles consistently distinguish effective reentry programs from ineffective ones.

- Start before release. Programs that begin services while participants are still incarcerated produce better outcomes than programs that wait until the day of release. The Federal Bureau of Prisons' own philosophy states that release preparation should begin on the first day of incarceration.
- Address the full reintegration ecosystem. Housing, employment, behavioral health, legal issues, education, and family relationships are not separate domains. They are interdependent. Programs that address only one or two while ignoring others leave participants structurally vulnerable.
- Match services to individual need. The Risk-Needs-Responsivity model, which guides best-practice correctional programming, holds that intervention intensity should match risk level, services should target the specific needs most correlated with recidivism, and approaches should be responsive to individual learning styles and circumstances. One-size-fits-all programming produces one-size-fits-all mediocre results.
- Center dignity and strengths. Programs that treat returning citizens as problems to be managed rather than people with assets, experiences, and goals consistently underperform programs that take a strengths-based approach. People who are seen as capable of contribution become capable of contribution.
- Build long-term relationships. Reentry is not an event. It is a process that unfolds over months and years. Programs that provide brief services and then disengage produce brief improvements and then reengagement with the criminal justice system. Sustained relational support, whether through case management, mentorship, peer networks, or community ties, is what makes reintegration durable.
- Hire people with lived experience. Programs staffed by people who have navigated the reentry process themselves operate with a credibility, empathy, and practical knowledge that no amount of professional training fully replicates. Peer-based models are not a supplement to professional services. They are often their core.

## IV. Starting a Reentry Program: A Practitioner's Framework

### A. Begin With the Community, Not the Concept

The most common mistake in starting a reentry program is beginning with a program design rather than a community relationship. Before writing a logic model, before drafting bylaws, before applying for a grant, spend meaningful time in the community you intend to serve. Sit down with returning citizens. Listen to what they say they need, not what you assume they need. Connect with parole and probation officers, public defenders, prosecutors, social workers, and housing providers to understand what gaps exist and what coordination challenges are most acute.

Community-based asset mapping, the process of inventorying existing resources before deciding what to build, prevents duplication and reveals partnership opportunities that program-first thinking misses entirely. The question is not 'What program should I create?' but 'What does this community need that does not already exist, and where can I fill that gap most effectively?'

## **B. Define Your Population and Your Theory of Change**

Reentry is a broad field. The most effective programs are not broadly focused. They are precisely targeted. Define your population: Are you serving people leaving state prison? Local jail? People on probation or parole? Adults? Youth? Women? Veterans? Individuals with specific behavioral health needs? People convicted of particular offense types? The narrower and more specific your population definition, the more precisely you can design services to meet actual needs.

Your theory of change should articulate clearly: What problem are you solving? What intervention are you deploying? What outcomes do you expect, and on what timeline? What does success look like at three months, one year, three years? A theory of change is not a bureaucratic requirement for funders. It is a thinking discipline that forces honest reckoning with what your program can and cannot do.

## **C. Build Your Resource Infrastructure Before You Open the Doors**

Undercapitalized reentry programs cause harm. They raise expectations they cannot meet, they burn out staff, and they damage the trust of the communities they serve. Before launching services, secure sufficient resources to deliver on your commitments for at least 12 to 18 months.

Diversify your funding from the start. Second Chance Act grants through the Bureau of Justice Assistance are the federal anchor funding source for reentry programming. State justice reinvestment funds, county behavioral health and human services grants, foundation support, and private sector workforce development partnerships all represent legitimate and important revenue streams. The Work Opportunity Tax Credit should be built into your employer engagement strategy from day one, both as a financial incentive for partners and as a potential consulting revenue stream.

Invest in your case management infrastructure before you invest in programming. The ability to track participant needs, monitor progress, document outcomes, and generate reports for funders is not administrative overhead. It is the backbone of a learning organization. Programs that cannot demonstrate outcomes cannot sustain funding.

## **D. Partner Strategically**

No reentry program can or should provide all services itself. Housing, employment, behavioral health, legal services, education, and family support are distinct service domains with distinct expertise requirements. The most effective reentry programs function as connective tissue in a service ecosystem, not as comprehensive service providers.

Identify three or four anchor partners before launch: a transitional housing provider, a behavioral health agency with justice-involved experience, a workforce development organization or employer network, and a legal aid provider or law school clinic. Formalize those relationships through memoranda of understanding that specify roles, referral protocols, data sharing agreements, and accountability structures. Informal partnerships dissolve when staff turns over and organizations face competing priorities.

Faith communities deserve particular attention as partners. They are present in virtually every neighborhood, they operate with minimal bureaucracy, they can mobilize volunteers and social capital at scale, and they provide the unconditional belonging that professional service systems rarely offer. The history of reentry work in America is inseparable from the history of faith-based community service.

## **E. Hire Right**

The quality of your staff will determine the quality of your program. For reentry programs, the most important hiring criterion is often neither academic credential nor professional experience. It is the combination of personal integrity, practical wisdom, and the capacity to form trusting relationships with people who have learned not to trust institutions.

People with lived experience of incarceration and reentry are not auxiliary staff. They are often your most effective practitioners. Peer specialists, mentors, and case managers who have navigated the reentry process themselves bring a credibility and a knowledge base that training cannot provide. Build hiring practices, compensation structures, and career ladders that treat lived experience as a genuine professional asset.

Invest in professional development, supervision, and organizational support for all staff, and especially for staff with lived experience. Vicarious trauma, secondary traumatic stress, and burnout are occupational hazards in reentry work. Organizations that do not take staff wellbeing seriously lose their best people and compromise the quality of services to participants.

## **F. Measure What Matters**

Outcome measurement in reentry is both a funder requirement and a moral obligation. If you are asking returning citizens to invest their time and trust in your program, you owe them a rigorous answer to the question of whether what you are doing actually helps.

The field has largely moved beyond measuring only recidivism, which is a lagging indicator that depends as much on policing and supervision practices as on individual behavior. Measure proximate outcomes: employment rates and wages at 30, 90, and 180 days. Housing stability. Behavioral health treatment engagement. Educational enrollment and credential attainment. Family reunification. Social support network strength. These intermediate outcomes are both more actionable and more informative than long-term recidivism data.

Build a data feedback loop that runs from data collection to program decision-making. Collect data consistently, analyze it regularly, share findings with staff and participants, and use what you learn to modify services. Programs that treat evaluation as a reporting requirement rather than a learning tool sacrifice the most powerful asset they have: the ability to get better over time.

# **V. Scaling a Reentry Program: From Pilot to Movement**

## **A. Prove It Before You Grow It**

The graveyard of the nonprofit sector is littered with programs that scaled before they were ready. Premature scaling dilutes program quality, strains organizational capacity, and can turn a promising pilot into a mediocre large program that fails participants at greater volume. The first priority is fidelity: ensuring that your core program model is being implemented consistently, producing the outcomes you intend, and can be described clearly enough that someone else could replicate it.

Document your program model with enough specificity to constitute a replication guide. What are the core components? What are the non-negotiable elements versus the adaptable ones? What does a participant's journey through the program look like week by week? What are your quality benchmarks? If you cannot answer these questions, you are not ready to scale.

## **B. Build the Infrastructure, Not Just the Programs**

Organizational infrastructure, financial systems, human resources, data management, communications, governance, and community relationships, is what makes scale possible. Programs grow by adding participants. Organizations grow by building systems that can support more programs and more participants without losing quality or coherence.

Invest in financial management capacity early. Many reentry organizations that receive large grants for the first time find themselves in crisis because they lack the financial infrastructure to manage the reporting requirements, cash flow timing, and compliance demands that public funding brings. A strong CFO or financial director is not a luxury for a growing reentry organization. It is a prerequisite for survival.

## **C. Pursue Policy Change in Parallel**

Individual programs can change individual lives. Policy change can change the conditions facing millions of lives. The most impactful reentry organizations work at both levels simultaneously.

Document the systemic barriers your participants face and translate that documentation into policy advocacy. If housing exclusions are your biggest barrier, build relationships with housing authorities and public housing advocates and bring your data to those conversations. If occupational licensing restrictions are blocking your participants from the trades, work with your state legislature on reform. If your participants are being revoked for technical supervision violations at high rates, engage your corrections department on supervision reform.

Policy advocacy requires a different skill set than direct service, but they are complementary and mutually reinforcing. Your program data gives your advocacy credibility. Your policy wins create better conditions for your programs. Organizations that integrate direct service and advocacy are not confused about their mission. They are working at the scale the problem requires.

## **D. Build Coalitions, Not Just Organizations**

The most durable and impactful reentry work happens through coalitions. No single organization has the reach, the resources, or the legitimacy to drive systems change alone. Coalitions that bring together returning citizens, direct service providers, government agencies, employers, housing providers, faith communities, and research institutions can produce change that individual organizations cannot.

Position your organization as a convener and collaborator, not just a service provider. Host quarterly stakeholder convenings. Participate in regional reentry councils. Build relationships with corrections departments, parole boards, and prosecutors' offices. Invest in the infrastructure of the field, not just your own program.

## **E. Amplify Voices with Lived Experience**

Scaling reentry work without centering the voices of people with lived experience is not just a missed opportunity. It is a form of institutional arrogance. Returning citizens are not beneficiaries of reentry programs. They are experts in their own right, experts in what it feels like to leave prison without resources, experts in what barriers are most acute, experts in what kinds of support make a difference and which ones are performative.

Build governance structures that formally include returning citizens. Bring people with lived experience onto your board of directors, your advisory committees, and your policy advocacy teams. Create paid positions, not volunteer roles, for people with lived experience in leadership.

Organizations that do this are consistently more effective, more trusted, and more innovative than organizations that do not.

## VI. Conclusion: The Work Ahead

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The reentry field has made genuine progress. State reincarceration rates are down. Federal investment is sustained and bipartisan. States are setting ambitious goals. Employers are engaging. Researchers and practitioners are working together more effectively than at any previous point in the field's history.

And yet the scale of the challenge dwarfs the scale of the response. Six hundred thousand people released every year. Millions moving through local jails. A quarter of a million people with no educational credential. A housing market that treats a criminal record as a permanent disqualification. An occupational licensing system riddled with barriers that have nothing to do with public safety. A supervision system that imposes twelve requirements a day and reincarcerates people for technical violations at massive cost to individuals, families, and communities.

The question is not whether we have the knowledge to do better. We do. The question is whether we have the political will, the institutional commitment, and the community infrastructure to act on what we know at the scale the problem demands.

Reentry is not a criminal justice issue. It is a housing issue, a workforce issue, a public health issue, a family stability issue, and a community economic development issue. Organizations and coalitions that bring that cross-sectoral perspective to the work, that refuse to treat returning citizens as a problem belonging solely to corrections, are building the field that the moment requires.

The people coming home deserve better than what they have historically received. And the communities they return to deserve the contributions those people are ready to make. Getting this right is not charity. It is justice. And it is the most effective investment any community can make in its own future.

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## About the Author

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John's reentry work is entirely pro bono and independent, unaffiliated with any organization or program. Formerly incarcerated people reach out to him directly, and he connects them with services and employment opportunities, teaches AI fundamentals, and maintains long-term personal relationships with them.

He holds an MPA from SUNY Buffalo State, where his graduate research examined risk factors among justice-involved youth in New York State programs. He previously served as a Regional Executive Director for a national nonprofit youth justice organization and personally authored a competitive OJJDP Comprehensive Anti-Gang Program grant. His experience with the New York State correctional system, including time at Auburn Correctional Facility and Southport Correctional Facility, informs both the analytical perspective and the moral urgency of his work.