THE PHOENIX MANDATE: A Blueprint for Transformative Reentry and Economic Stabilization in Providence (English Administration, 2026)

This document serves as the formal, detailed policy blueprint for the implementation of the Providence Phoenix Program, the foundational initiative of the Michael English Administration, effective upon inauguration in 2026. This mandate establishes a new standard for public safety and economic development, prioritizing investment in human capital over the enduring financial and social costs of correctional system failure.

I. Executive Mandate: Michael English's Vision for a Safer and More Dignified Providence

A. Reframing Public Safety: Shifting from Reaction to Investment

The persistent cycle of recidivism is interpreted by the English Administration not merely as a consequence of individual failure but as a critical failure of existing public policy to provide effective post-release support. The Phoenix Program is the cornerstone of a new executive mandate designed to prioritize proactive community investment over continuous, high-cost reactive policing and incarceration. The program directly addresses foundational mayoral priorities, including economic development, workforce participation, affordable housing, and the creation of safe, healthy communities.

A critical evaluation of the current landscape reveals that Providence, as the state capital, faces distinct and severe structural vulnerabilities. While Rhode Island generally maintains low crime rates, Providence's violent crime rate remains approximately 30% higher than the national average, and its property crime rate is about 40% higher. The Administration directly links these high localized crime rates to the systemic failure of inadequate post-release support mechanisms. With data indicating that over half of released individuals return to custody, and the average time spent in the community before reoffending is only 11 months, addressing this post-release failure is identified as the most direct and effective method to stabilize crime, enhance community safety, and secure neighborhoods. By correcting this trajectory, the Phoenix Program transforms public safety strategy from merely managing crime symptoms to fundamentally addressing root causes—housing instability, mental health crises, and joblessness. The program's anticipated cost-effectiveness, yielding a projected $6.73 in benefits for every dollar invested, positions it as a key strategy for efficient and effective government.

B. The Unique Credibility of Leadership: Instilling Dignity and Strategic Acumen

The Phoenix Program is founded on the profound philosophical belief that every individual, irrespective of past mistakes, possesses the inherent capacity for change and deserves a genuine opportunity to correct their path. The program's central aim is to "instill dignity" into the person being released, fostering a renewed sense of self-worth, agency, and purpose. This foundational commitment ensures the initiative moves beyond simple crime prevention toward comprehensive personal empowerment.

English's leadership model—combining rigorous academic credentials, including a Doctor of Ministry (D.Min), a Master of Business Administration (MBA), and a Paralegal Certificate, with profound lived experience—provides unparalleled empathy, credibility, and the necessary strategic acumen for overseeing a complex, multi-faceted executive program. The blend of lived experience ensures the program connects authentically with participants and anticipates the nuanced struggles of reentry, which is crucial for building trust and rapport. Furthermore, the inclusion of the MBA credential is essential, assuring the business community and government transition staff that the program will be managed with business efficiency, strategic focus, and an emphasis on demonstrable Return on Investment (ROI). This synthesis of deep ethical understanding and fiscal expertise provides a powerful differentiator, confirming confidence in the program's long-term viability and managing the complexity of leveraging federal funds, managing large-scale operations, and engaging the private sector.

II. The Urgent Crisis: Economic and Social Costs of Recidivism in Providence

A. Quantitative Analysis of Systemic Failure

Data from the Rhode Island Department of Corrections (RIDOC) underscores the persistent and costly challenge of the "revolving-prison-door phenomenon". A significant 43.3% of individuals released from incarceration return to sentenced status within three years, and an even higher 55.7% return to awaiting trial status. This highlights ongoing, immediate engagement with the criminal justice system upon release, even if a new sentence is not immediately imposed.
The most compelling finding validating the urgency of the Phoenix Program is the velocity of reoffending: the majority of recidivists (56%) reoffend rapidly, occurring within the critical **first year** of release. The average time spent in the community before reoffending is a mere 11 months, decreasing to 9.4 months for those released from nonviolent offenses. This evidence validates the Phoenix Program's core strategic consideration: immediate, intensive, and timely support is non-negotiable to prevent rapid re-engagement with criminal activity. Resources must be dedicated to groups demonstrating the highest risk profile, specifically individuals 24 years old or less, who exhibit a 57% recidivism rate, and those assessed as moderate/high or high risk (LSI-R scores), who return to RIDOC at a rate of 68%.

The urgency metrics confirm the necessity of the Phoenix Mandate:
Providence Recidivism Crisis: Urgency Metrics and High-Risk Demographics

Metric	Value (RIDOC Data)	Programmatic Significance
Overall 3-Year Recidivism Rate (Sentenced Status)	43.3% of 14,841 individuals	Indicates a fundamental failing in existing post-release support structures.
Overall 3-Year Recidivism Rate (Awaiting Trial Status)	55.7% of released individuals	Highlights ongoing, immediate engagement with the criminal justice system upon release.
Percentage Reoffending within 1 Year	56% of recidivists	Emphasizes the critical "golden window" for intervention immediately post-release.
Average Time in Community Before Reoffending	11 months (9.4 months for nonviolent)	Reinforces the urgency for Phase 1 of the Phoenix Program to prioritize immediate, intensive support.
Recidivism Rate for Individuals \le 24 Years Old	57%	Requires targeted, age-appropriate mentorship and intervention strategies.
Recidivism Rate for High LSI-R Scores	68%	Validates the targeted approach based on the

Metric	Value (RIDOC Data)	Programmatic Significance
		Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR) model.

B. The Financial Imperative: Cost Avoidance as Economic Strategy

The continuous cycling of individuals in and out of incarceration imposes massive expenditures on state and federal correctional systems. This persistent financial burden is strategically addressed by the Phoenix Program, which views investment in effective reentry as a highly cost-effective public strategy. Research indicates that every dollar invested in these programs can generate substantial returns, yielding a documented **$6.73 in benefits**. These measurable benefits include avoided criminal justice costs for taxpayers and reduced victimization costs for the community.

The Administration leverages this high Return on Investment (ROI) to frame the program as a mandatory financial investment designed to reduce the city's long-term structural debt associated with constant incarceration cycling. By investing upfront capital, the city converts a guaranteed future expenditure into a guaranteed future saving. This efficiency aligns directly with the mandate for "efficient & effective government" and elevates the Phoenix Program above typical social service spending.

C. Targeted Intervention for Maximum Impact

The Phoenix Program implements a deliberate and strategic focus, targeting individuals who have served sentences exceeding two years or those who lack established family or community ties upon release. This population faces the steepest systemic impediments, including severely limited access to job opportunities, housing, and crucial public benefits, which often render successful reintegration "practically impossible". Individuals without immediate support networks are inherently more susceptible to recidivism, especially during the high-risk first 12 months post-release. By concentrating resources on this high-need, high-risk group, the program maximizes its impact on overall recidivism rates and ensures the provision of intensive, wrap-around services that directly compensate for absent natural support systems.

III. The Providence Phoenix Program: Evidence-Based Framework and Core Pillars

The Providence Phoenix Program is meticulously designed to align with the Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR) model, ensuring that support is individualized, intensive, and evidence-based.

A. Pillar 1: Whole-Person Wellness – The Prerequisite for Sustainable Success

Successful reintegration requires addressing the complex underlying factors that often contribute to recidivism, extending beyond mere job placement. The Administration mandates a clinical prioritization based on the critical RIDOC finding that **"Wellness and substance use disorder (SUD) treatment showed the strongest negative correlations with recidivism,"** an impact surpassing that of vocational training or education. Therefore, the Phoenix Program will implement a staged engagement process: Phase A, Wellness Stabilization, must be prioritized before high-stakes job placement, which occurs in Phase B, Workforce Integration. This mandates robust, integrated referrals and ongoing follow-up for mental health and SUD challenges as a core component. Furthermore, holistic support includes fostering pro-social behavior by developing "Healthy Thinking Patterns" and "Effective Coping Strategies" through essential mentoring and connecting individuals with vital community resources.

B. Pillar 2: Foundational Stability – Housing and Essential Benefits

Access to affordable, safe, and stable housing is recognized as a fundamental human right and a critical determinant of successful reentry, providing the essential foundation upon which all other reentry efforts can build. The Phoenix Program will provide direct assistance with housing stability, navigating pathways to appropriate accommodation and leveraging collaborations with existing transitional housing models like Amos House.

Crucially, the program's mandate prioritizes "Zero-Day Survival," recognizing the need for immediate, intensive support to stabilize participants within the critical window before reoffending can occur. Systemic barriers, such as limited access to public benefits and identification, actively create vulnerability. To counteract the financial desperation that drives the 9.4-month average time to reoffend for nonviolent crimes, the Administration mandates that Phoenix staff secure government identification and enroll participants in essential federal and state benefits (e.g., Medicaid, SSI/SSDI) rapidly, ideally within the first 72 hours post-release. By removing these systemic roadblocks immediately, the individual is stabilized sufficiently to engage meaningfully in job readiness and wellness programs.

C. Pillar 3: Workforce Reintegration and Skill Alignment

Meaningful employment is the cornerstone of successful reentry, fostering economic independence and a renewed sense of purpose. The program's workforce strategy begins with a pre-release mandate: planning and needs assessment must commence **"at least 18 months prior to release"** through formal partnerships with the Rhode Island Department of Corrections (RIDOC). This early engagement ensures tailored treatment plans and skill alignment that utilizes the RNR framework.

Upon release, the program will provide hands-on assistance with job readiness components, including resume development, interview preparation, and provision of appropriate clothing.

Training initiatives will be strategically focused on **"skills required for in-demand jobs that they can fill quickly upon reentry,"** collaborating with partners like the Reentry Campus Program and Amos House for accredited education and vocational training. The Phoenix Program will function as the **"central hub to match employers seeking talent with formerly incarcerated persons seeking jobs,"** streamlining the connection between qualified, screened candidates and available employment opportunities.

IV. A New Partnership with Business: The Employer Liability Assurance Policy (ELAP) Strategy

The Employer Liability Assurance Policy (ELAP) strategy is the critical mechanism mandated by the Administration to fundamentally unlock employment opportunities by proactively mitigating both perceived and actual risks for the private sector. This focus ensures that the program is viewed not as a burden on employers, but as a source of risk-mitigated, supported talent.

A. Understanding the Employer Barrier: Beyond Basic Risk

The Administration recognizes that a significant barrier to employment for returning citizens is the perception of increased liability for potential employers. Employers frequently express concerns about "negligent hiring" claims, where liability might arise if the employer knew or should have known that an employee posed an "unreasonable risk to other employees or the public". While legal analysis confirms that simply hiring an individual with a criminal record is generally not sufficient to trigger liability, the *fear* of litigation, reputational damage, and defense costs remains a significant operational barrier that the ELAP must address. It is crucial to distinguish this from standard risks like employee dishonesty (theft, embezzlement) or workplace injury (covered by Workers' Compensation).

B. De-Risking the Hire: Practical Mechanisms for Employers

The ELAP strategy employs a multi-pronged approach to de-risk the hiring process, maximizing existing federal protections and providing extensive administrative support.

1. Leveraging the Federal Bonding Program (FBP) for Dishonesty Risk

The program mandates the active promotion and facilitation of the Federal Bonding Program (FBP), an underutilized federal resource designed to protect employers against financial loss specifically due to employee dishonesty (theft, forgery, larceny, or embezzlement). The FBP offers substantial, zero-cost protections that directly address the commercial insurance industry's reluctance to bond individuals with prior conviction records. The benefits include:

- Coverage of **$5,000** (with potential for up to $25,000 in justified cases).
- Coverage provided for the initial **six months of employment** at no cost to the employer.
- **No deductible** for the employer.
- A proven track record, boasting an impressive **99% success rate** in job placements for "at-risk" individuals.

2. Maximizing Economic Incentives: The Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC)

To provide substantial financial advantages to employers, the Phoenix Program ensures aggressive utilization of the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC). This federal tax credit is available to employers hiring Qualified Ex-Felons. The credit is calculated based on a percentage of wages paid in the first year, potentially providing up to 40% of the first $6,000 in wages, equating to a maximum **$2,400 tax credit per qualified hire**.

Complex tax incentives often go underutilized by small and medium-sized businesses due to administrative complexity. To ensure high employer participation and guarantee the full economic benefit is realized, the Phoenix Program staff will function as the mandatory WOTC administrative hub. Staff will handle all pre-screening and certification paperwork, which must be submitted to the relevant state workforce agency within 28 calendar days after the new hire's start date. This administrative support transforms the incentive into a seamless, high-value component of the ELAP strategy, significantly incentivizing immediate employment.

C. The Phoenix Risk Mitigation Fund (PRF) – Re-envisioning the Dignity Contribution

The Administration has codified the concept of participants contributing "via hourly terms" into a small, proportional contribution to the Phoenix Risk Mitigation Fund (PRF). This act of contribution fosters a profound sense of ownership, responsibility, and investment in the program’s collective success, directly aligning with the core mission to "instill dignity".

The establishment of the PRF provides a psychological assurance to employers that the program holds itself accountable and that participants are financially invested in their success, bridging the gap necessary to overcome residual hesitations regarding liability. The PRF serves two critical, interconnected roles:

1. **Funding Holistic Support (Risk Reduction):** Primarily, contributions fund the program’s intensive services—mental health treatment, mentorship, and comprehensive case management—which are the **ultimate "insurance policy"**. The comprehensive support dramatically reduces the actual likelihood of recidivism and, consequently, reduces the risk of new criminal acts that could trigger a negligent hiring claim.

2. **Covering Uninsured Gaps:** The fund can be leveraged to address specific, minor, uninsured risks or non-litigious claims for employers that fall outside the scope of the FBP and general liability policies. This may include providing immediate, rapid legal consultation for employers facing unfounded claims, thereby proactively buying down the initial defense costs and anxiety associated with liability concerns.

Integrated Risk Mitigation Framework for Employers (ELAP)

Employer Concern	**Standard Mitigation Tool**	**Phoenix Program (ELAP) Solution**	**Benefit to Employer**
Employee Dishonesty (Theft, Fraud)	Fidelity Bond (FBP)	Direct facilitation of **no-cost Federal Bonding Program** coverage ($5,000 for 6 months).	Zero-cost financial protection against loss due to employee dishonesty.
Negligent Hiring Liability (New Criminal Act)	Due Diligence & General Liability	**Comprehensive Support Mandate:** Intensive post-release holistic support (Mental Health, SUD, Housing,	Liability mitigated by proven evidence-based risk assessment (RNR) and drastically reduced risk of reoffending.

Employer Concern	Standard Mitigation Tool	Phoenix Program (ELAP) Solution	Benefit to Employer
		Mentorship) actively reduces actual risk.	
Administrative Burden of Incentives	Employer Compliance	**WOTC Administrative Hub:** Phoenix staff manages all pre-screening and certification paperwork.	Seamless acquisition of up to $2,400 in federal tax credits per hire.
Uninsured/Minor Incidents & Reputational Risk	Employer Absorbs Cost	**Phoenix Risk Mitigation Fund (PRF):** Participant-owned fund covering minor uninsured gaps and supporting core risk-reduction services.	Access to small claims funds and demonstration of program accountability and participant ownership.

V. Strategic Implementation and Governance (The 2026-2030 Roadmap)

A. Phased Rollout and Operationalizing Partnerships

The Phoenix Program will be launched through a carefully controlled phased rollout, beginning with a Pilot program focused on establishing formal Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) and rigorous referral pathways. The Administration recognizes that Providence already possesses a valuable infrastructure of established reentry organizations, and attempting to replicate all services would be inefficient and costly. Therefore, the Phoenix Program will act as a specialized coordinating hub, focusing its unique resources (ELAP, specialized leadership) on the high-need "no ties" population, while strategically leveraging existing, established services. This approach maximizes resource utilization and ensures a holistic continuum of care.

Mandatory collaboration requires formalizing partnerships with the Rhode Island Department of Corrections (RIDOC) for early intervention (18 months prior to release), Amos House for housing and vocational training, and the Nonviolence Institute for community support. This collaborative framework is essential for ensuring a seamless transition and optimizing scalability and long-term sustainability.

B. Governance: Establishing the Executive Working Group

Effective systemic change requires an executive mandate that transcends individual agency silos. The English Administration will immediately convene a dedicated, high-level **Working Group on Returning Residents**. This group will be comprised of key stakeholders, including City departments, State agencies, the business community, service providers, and individuals with lived experience.

Elevating the reentry strategy to an executive-level working group ensures the political continuity and the necessary collaborative framework across municipal agencies (e.g., Workforce, Health, Housing). This top-level mandate provides the authority required to streamline bureaucratic processes—such as securing government identification or coordinating WOTC certification—which are essential to the speed and effectiveness of the program. Without this executive coordination, achieving comprehensive change is structurally impossible.

C. Sustainable Funding Model

Securing diverse and sustainable funding is critical for the Phoenix Program's long-term success. The Administration is committed to aggressively pursuing competitive federal grants, particularly those available through the **Second Chance Act**, which offers substantial funding for adult reentry and employment programs.

Advocacy will be directed towards securing stable state appropriations by demonstrating the program's proven cost-effectiveness and linking success to statewide mandates for recidivism reduction. Furthermore, the program will explore innovative funding mechanisms, such as investigating the potential to direct a portion of criminal justice system fines and fees toward reentry services, or exploring advanced models like "Pay-for-Success". The program’s alignment with executive priorities, including fiscal responsibility and the goal of economic development, maximizes its attractiveness for city investment and advocacy for external funds.

VI. Transformational Community Impact

A. Quantifiable Public Safety Gains

By stabilizing the high-risk demographic (those returning quickly and those with high LSI-R scores), the Phoenix Program is projected to significantly reduce the overall crime rate in Providence, contributing directly to the vision of "Safe & Healthy Communities". The current recidivism rates—with over 55% of individuals returning to criminal justice system involvement—represent a critical opportunity for intervention. The program’s success in preventing individuals from reoffending directly translates into fewer incidents of violent and property crime, thereby addressing the public’s urgent concern that crime has been elevated. Enhanced public safety is a direct and measurable consequence of reducing the flow of individuals cycling back into the criminal justice system.

B. Economic Expansion and Workforce Stabilization

The successful reintegration facilitated by the Phoenix Program drives economic stability by transforming formerly incarcerated individuals from net tax burdens into productive members of the workforce who contribute to the local tax base. This actively supports the Administration’s goal to "rebuild Providence's economy" and adapt for the "jobs of the future". The strategic utilization of the WOTC and the FBP, managed by the Phoenix Program staff, guarantees a reliable, risk-mitigated talent pool. This provides local businesses with valuable financial incentives and access to reliable employees, fostering economic growth and greater workforce participation.

C. Cultivating an Inclusive and Dignified City

By instilling dignity and providing clear, supported pathways to self-sufficiency, the Phoenix Program empowers individuals who have historically faced marginalization and systemic barriers. This initiative actively promotes social equity and inclusivity, ensuring that returning citizens have the opportunity to thrive. The program's success extends beyond merely avoiding re-arrest; it aims for profound social good by cultivating an inclusive and stable civic environment. This deep, lasting transformation leads to stronger families, reduced intergenerational crime cycles, and the cultivation of an intangible but crucial civic asset: trust and inclusion, ensuring every returning citizen has the chance to truly contribute and belong to a vibrant Providence.

VII. Conclusion and Executive Call to Action

The Phoenix Mandate represents the English Administration’s commitment to evidence-based governance, fiscal prudence, and profound social transformation. The urgency of the recidivism crisis and the clear financial benefits of effective intervention demand immediate action. The unique leadership model, combined with the innovative Employer Liability Assurance Policy (ELAP) framework—which strategically leverages the FBP, the WOTC, and the PRF to mitigate employer risk—positions the Providence Phoenix Program for unparalleled success.

This document serves as the detailed blueprint for immediate executive action in 2026. The Administration will proceed with the immediate convening of the Working Group on Returning Residents, the allocation of initial seed funding to establish the operational infrastructure, and the aggressive pursuit of federal grants, particularly through the Second Chance Act, to secure the program's long-term sustainability. The Phoenix Program is designed to transform Providence into a national model for effective, compassionate, and economically sound reentry policy.