

Statement By  
Commissioner Martin F. Horn  
New York City Departments of Correction and Probation

The Second Chance Act Symposium  
April 1, 2009

Mr. Chairman, members of Congress, thank you for this opportunity to address you today about an issue to which I have devoted my entire working life of almost 40 years. The Second Chance Act confirms this nations commitment to the notion that criminal lives can be reclaimed and the incarcerated can become productive, law-abiding members of our communities. Certainly there can be no better response to crime and no surer improvement in public safety than helping the incarcerated turn away from their criminal career and join our civil society.

I need not today speak to you about the scale of the reentry challenge facing our nation. You certainly already know that and other speakers today will no doubt expand upon it. Suffice to say that we must not lose sight of the more than 7 million men and women who leave our nation's jails each year, more than 10 times the number leaving prisons and each of them facing the same types of reentry challenges, often with fewer resources and support. We tend to dismiss the jail population as less dangerous, less needy, less severely disadvantaged than those returning home from prison. That is a mistake. The jail population is comprised of the very same individuals and many others facing even greater barriers to reentry by virtue of the absence of programming in jails, by virtue of the disproportionate number of them who are mentally ill, and by the paucity of services available to persons leaving jails as compared to prison release populations.

In New York City, we began to address this challenge in 2003 with a citywide discharge planning collaboration—a public/private partnership that brings together over 40 organizations and government agencies (list attached). We have continued to work and grow for over 6 years now adding partners and building on slow but steady successes. We focus on direct services to persons leaving our jails, public benefits, housing, employment, substance abuse treatment and policy change.

Through our work together we have accomplished much. We reengineered our jail admission process to focus on discharge planning because we recognized that waiting even a day is too long. We initiated weekly data matches with our government partners who serve the homeless (DHS), provide public health care (DOHMH), and public benefits (HRA) to identify individuals involved in multiple public systems, and more effectively serve them. To connect members of the public with reentry services in the community, we incorporated information on “Jail Release Services” into New York City’s 311 public information line. 311 now receives over 4,600 such calls each year. And since 2005 we have attracted over \$15 million in additional public and private funding to support our efforts.

These investments have supported the development of programs proven to help those leaving NYC jail to break the cycle of recidivism. Our Rikers Island Discharge Enhancement initiative, or RIDE, engages sentenced inmates while they are in jail, and provides services and case management to them in the community for up to 90 days after release. Over 33,000 individuals have participated in RIDE since 2004

and a John Jay College evaluation showed that RIDE completers have a 29% lower recidivism rate than non-completers.

Since the beginning of our collaboration, we have been aware of a substantial subgroup who cycle between the city jail and shelter systems. Data matches with the Department of Homeless Services indicate that over 30% of those in city shelters have previously been in jail and 9.5% of the city shelter population is made up of parolees from state prison. Our Frequent Users Service Enhancement Program, or FUSE, serves individuals who cycle between city jails and homeless shelters through supportive housing and intensive services. Of the 125 frequent users served by FUSE, 85% have remained housed, and the use of shelter and jail have dramatically decreased amongst participants, from 116 shelter days/year/participant to 1 shelter day/year/participant and from 38 jail days/year/participant to 18 jail days/year/participant.

To provide a meaningful alternative to a short jail stay, we developed the Day Custody program. Day Custody is an alternative-to-jail for repeat misdemeanants that provides needs assessments, counseling and service referrals. Day Custody has served over 1,700 clients to date; 80% have completed the program and the completers have shown a 17% lower recidivism rate after 5 months than non-completers.

To succeed upon release, persons leaving jail must have a place to live and be able to work or access the supportive services they need. That means they must have necessary documents. Any reentry plan that doesn't ensure that persons leaving custody have birth certificates, social security cards and access to benefits for which they are eligible is failing. Making sure everyone leaving jail and prison is what we call "document ready" to work should be a required performance measure for reentry work. Since July 2006 we have helped over 2,000 clients verify or replace social security cards; 2,000 clients have been newly enrolled in Medicaid or been given replacements of lost enrollments; we have obtained birth certificates for over 1,500 clients and have processed food stamp applications for many others.

Finally, with support from Mayor Bloomberg's Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) we have also launched the **NYC Justice Corps** in conjunction with John Jay College. The NYC Justice Corps seeks to reduce poverty and recidivism among young adults involved in the criminal justice system, and support community development. The Justice Corps pays participants to help identify and execute *community benefit projects* in their home communities, followed by subsidized internships and permanent job or educational placement services. Since launching in September of 2008, the program has already served 180 youth, with an 85% retention rate, and has shown significant ability to place these youth in internships and permanent jobs.

These programs are a sample of all the initiatives we are currently engaged in to improve the outcomes for those leaving city jail and returning to our city's communities. We have worked over six years to build the service infrastructure and partnerships with other city agencies and community organizations that have allowed us to achieve this modest success. We hope to build on this success with the opportunity that a fully funded Second Chance Act will provide.

The most important lesson we have learned, and the message I ask you to take with you today if nothing else is this—reentry must occur on the local level. It is a community responsibility. It can be facilitated

and helped along at the State level, but every community must take responsibility for its own incarcerated sons and daughters if reentry work is to be successful. Government cannot do reentry work alone; ownership of “reentry” must be shared with the community and every community is unique. There must be a “critical mass” of community capacity. If it doesn’t exist, it must be created.

For reentry to be successful, sobriety, employment housing and family reunification must be addressed together. These issues are interdependent, and must be addressed together.

What happens in prison and jails is highly relevant; internal jail culture can make a big difference in the incarcerated individual’s motivation and willingness to change. Similarly, prisons and jails have to be drug-free, safe places in order for reentry work to remain the focus and to be successful.

Finally, I encourage my colleagues to focus on results, be willing to take risks and make mistakes. Bold and creative thinking is what is required if we are to effectively address the scale and complexity of the reentry problem.

Cognizant of this fact, we didn’t wait on the Second Chance Act to get started. However, we gratefully welcome the opportunity it represents to build on what we have already achieved, and take significant steps forward.

I congratulate Congressman Davis and his colleagues on this achievement and look forward to working with you to make the promise of Second Chance a reality. I also understand that Congressman Davis’ office is exploring possibilities for a re-entry housing bill. I am delighted to hear that and strongly support those efforts. Supportive and affordable housing is a critical element of comprehensive re-entry strategies, particularly for those people returning to the community with complex health and behavioral health issues.

Thank you for your time, I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.