

**REPORT OF THE
COOK COUNTY SHERIFF'S REENTRY COUNCIL**

**INTERIM REPORT
NOVEMBER, 2007 TO JUNE, 2008**

THOMAS J. DART, SHERIFF

Sheriff's Steering Committee on Reentry
Initial Report
March 27, 2008

I. Introduction/ History

In March, 2007 Sheriff Thomas J. Dart assembled a work group within the Cook County Department of Corrections to look at what happens to detainees when they are released from the jail and return to their communities. The starting point for the work group was the large number of persons who are detained and released each year – approximately 100,000 – at the largest jail facility in the country. Included within that population are offenders who are at high risk for re-arrest and detention because of substance abuse, mental illness, homelessness or lack of income. The cycle of recurring arrest and incarceration of persons affected by those conditions has a negative impact on home communities when they are released from detention by the courts and contributes to jail overcrowding when they are again detained. Because of the large number of persons released from the jail each year, communities are also impacted by the reentry of first-time detainees, who may be returning without resources for treatment, employment, housing, or support. While all areas of the county are affected to some degree, some communities experience in excess of 3,000 reentries from jail each year (as much as 6% to 8% of the community population), a flow that could overwhelm any neighborhood.

The staff work group looked at obstacles to successful reentry, impact on home communities, recidivism, and needs for increased or improved support services in basic areas of housing, employment, income stabilization and treatment for substance abuse and mental illness. As the group began to identify barriers to successful reentry and opportunities for improvement, its research demonstrated that the needed solutions were outside the scope of the Sheriff's Office and the Cook Department of Corrections and could only be accomplished through effective interagency collaboration and community capacity-building.

In November, 2007 the work group was reconstituted as the Sheriff's Steering Committee on Reentry and expanded to include participants from city and county government, Cermak hospital, the Illinois Department of Mental Health and local non-governmental organizations who are involved in the issues surrounding the jail population. (The current membership of the Committee is attached as Appendix A.)

The mission of the Reentry Committee is:

To improve programs and services within the jail which promote successful reentry, public safety and the best interest of the community when detainees are released and which will be based on best practice;

To identify and obtain public and private resources that will support the successful reentry of detainees to their communities;

To educate the public, elected officials, and community partners about the human and social costs of the repeated arrest and detention of non-violent offenders.

Within the scope of this mission, the Committee is identifying several immediate projects with community partners (discussed in Section III) that would reduce existing barriers to successful reentry

and is examining ways to improve coordination of existing services and data collection on the jail population, all to provide some immediate improvement in reentry practice. As an intermediate objective, the Committee will prepare legislative and policy recommendations for the Sheriff.

The reentry of incarcerated persons presents both challenges and opportunities for individual communities and the region. The large number and serious needs of individuals who move through the jail present challenges for local government, the criminal justice system and for the systems that provide services in mental health, public health, substance abuse treatment, income maintenance, homelessness, and child welfare. The scope of the reentry problem in Cook County is multi-systemic – state and local governments, the courts, public and private human services and the Cook County Department of Corrections are all involved. In addition to identifying specific barriers to successful reentry, the Steering Committee on Reentry understands that it must assist in developing a strategic approach to improving reentry services and to building active collaboration and coordination among all the public and private agencies concerned with the issue.

II. The Reentry Population

Gaining a sense of the size and characteristics of the population that enters and leaves the jail complex helps in understanding the scope of the challenge.

Cook County Jail is the largest single site jail facility in the U.S., with an annual census often exceeding 100,000 detainees and an average daily census of 10,500 men and women. The population of the jail is fluid and detainees vary widely in terms of their length of stay, offenses, criminal charges, individual characteristics, and ultimate case disposition. On any given day, the population of the jail is approximately 87-90% male and 10-13% female; 67-70% African American, 16-18% Latino, and 14-15% White.

Almost 36% of the population of the jail is under the age of 25; however there are also a significant percentage of older detainees. Almost 28% are between the ages of 26 and 35; almost 27% are between 36 and 45 years old. Sixteen percent are over age 45; almost half in that percentage are over the age of 50. The older and aging contingent in the jail population may have a range of issues involving physical and mental health, housing and income that are different from younger detainees. For example, eligibility and access to Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or veteran's benefits and health care are important issues for the older population. It may be that a significant percentage of this group is eligible for SSI or other benefits they are not receiving.

The majority of detainees (74%) spend less than 180 days in jail; 35% less than 30 days and 58% less than 90 days before release. However, a significant percentage – some 13% -- are held in the jail over a year, including a small percentage held for as long as 5 years.

There were almost 98,000 discharges from the jail in 2007. An estimated 13,000 to 15,000 of these were repeat offenders who had been detained and released more than once during the year. In 2006, of 15,302 repeat offenders, 916 had been detained in the jail 4 times or more during the year; of those, 109 had been held at the jail 6 times or more; and 45 had been admitted 7 times or more. This subpopulation of re-offenders includes a high percentage of persons who are chronically mentally ill and homeless.

Almost 34,000 of those discharged (35%) were persons who were able to post bond and return home after an average length of stay of 10 days in the jail. A large percentage of the detainee population

moves in and out quickly, spending a relatively short time at the jail. This may be an important factor to consider in planning programs or strategies to deal with reentry, as it does not afford much time to work with detainees around planning or preparing for reentry.

Approximately 23,000 (24%) of the discharges were transfers to another authority, such as another jail, a mental health facility, the Illinois Department of Corrections or the Illinois Youth Center, after average lengths of stay of 20 to 125 days. Those transferred to IDOC (after being convicted and sentenced) often served sentences of only 2 to 3 months after transfer, because of time served at the jail. Therefore, while they may not reenter the community immediately after release from the jail, they reenter not long after. The number of reentries from IDOC within 3 to 6 months of transfer from the jail should also be looked at within the scope of reentry in Chicago and suburbs.

A total of 14,426 discharges (15%) during the year, with average stay ranging from 11 to 744 days, occurred because of no further legal action against the detainees. These included *nolle prosequi* cases (prosecutor unwilling to pursue charges after indictment); charges dropped or not filed; quashed warrants; findings of no probable cause or wrong defendant; successful motions to vacate; not guilty verdicts; and cases stricken on leave. These detainees immediately re-entered the community.

A fourth major group (after those bonded-out, transferred or released because of no further legal action) left the jail through some form of court-ordered supervision, because their sentence had expired or because their time was considered served. Of more than 26,000 persons in this category, with an average stay ranging from 20 to 125 days, almost 11,000 received probation or supervision; 8,130 completed their sentence; and 6,403 were released because of time served .

The annualized discharge data for 2007 presented above presents an intimidating annual number of releases from the jail – 98,000 – which becomes more manageable when thought of as a daily average of 268 releases. Of that average daily number, not all released persons will require services or assistance. Capturing better data on the population characteristics and individual service needs of those released is vital to developing an accurate assessment what is needed to address systemic issues around reentry.

Community Reentry Data

The majority of persons released from the jail return to communities on the south and west sides; the communities of Garfield Park, Austin, Englewood, Roseland and North and South Lawndale are particularly impacted. The north side neighborhoods of Humboldt Park, Belmont/Cragin, Logan Square and West Town also account for significant percentages of the total. The highest number of discharges in Cook County outside of Chicago were in the cities of Cicero, Maywood and Harvey.

Self-reported home zip code data for 9,267 persons involved with the Cook County Department of Corrections on January 21, 2007 covered 518 U.S. zip codes, including 57 Chicago zip codes and some Cook suburban zip codes. Because the data are self-reported home addresses and not verified, they only provide a rough indication to where detainees might be returning. Many detainees may provide false data on home address; however, the data does closely match similar data from the Illinois Department of Corrections on their detainee home addresses. The data is useful for developing a relative ranking of impacted communities. Aggregate totals for contiguous community areas and for individual suburbs provide a picture of the concentrated impact of potential reentry of the current jail population on particular areas of the city and county:

Neighborhood/Municipality	Number	Percentage (%)
East & West Garfield Park; Austin	1,226	13.2
Near West & Lower West Sides	213	2.3
North & South Lawndale; Brighton Park	505	5.4
Humboldt Park; West Town; Logan Square	786	8.4
New City; Greater Grand Blvd.; Kenwood; Woodlawn; South Shore; Chatham	1,194	12.8
East & West Englewood	681	7.3
Roseland; West Roseland; Auburn/Gresham; Riverdale; South Deering	1,017	10.9
Chicago Lawn; West Lawn; Ashburn	312	3.3
Belmont/Cragin; Portage Park; Dunning	327	3.5
E. Rogers Park; Uptown	226	2.4
Chicago Heights	137	1.4
Harvey	128	1.3
Maywood	120	1.2
Cicero	89	0.9

Snapshot of released jail population in highest-impacted areas in Cook County

III. Identified Reentry Barriers and Issues

The focus on reentry cannot begin at the point that detainees are about to be released from the jail, a stage at which often very little can be done presently for either the individual or the community to support reentry, if there have been no prior efforts. The Committee has identified a number of barriers to successful reentry that are raised at different points in the criminal justice system:

A. “No-bond” Status

Defendants who have been repeatedly arrested for offences such as prostitution or drug use may not be allowed to post bond by the court for release from jail. This means that they cannot participate in a number of treatment program options that are available to persons who can be bonded. Some defendants in this category may not ever have been in treatment or may have had prior successful treatment experiences. Where proven treatment options for repeat offenders exist, such as through Women’s Justice Services, a significant number of persons who would be eligible are excluded from participating.

B. SSI and Veteran Benefits

It is estimated that a significant number of persons who pass through the Cook County Department of Corrections are eligible for benefits upon release, but don't receive them, either because there has never been an initial application or, in the case of SSI, benefits they were terminated by the Social Security Administration after 30 days of detention. A significant number of persons in jail are unable to work or are older. Many detainees over the age of 50 are probably eligible for SSI or, possibly, veteran benefits. Inability to access benefits makes it difficult for many released detainees to obtain treatment for medical and mental health conditions, substance abuse, food and shelter. This puts them at very high risk of recidivism and re-arrest.

As an immediate effort, the Committee is working with the Illinois Program of the Corporation for Supportive Housing and the Program Services Department of the jail to design and implement a project to screen detainees for SSI eligibility and to assist them in applying. The project will also work with Health & Disability Advocates and the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago SSI Advocacy Project to provide training to Correctional Rehabilitation Workers at the jail. The Committee is also exploring the issue of working with the State of Illinois to develop a means to suspend, rather than terminate Medicaid benefits (for those who enter the jail with Medicaid.) This would make it much easier for those individuals to regain benefits on discharge from the jail.

C. Individual Needs Assessment at Jail Admission/ Preparation for Reentry

Individuals remanded to the jail often arrive with acute needs for treatment or services, some of which, such as medical or psychiatric care, may be provided upon admission. Assessment upon entering the jail is essential for ensuring health, safety and appropriate care of detainees, but also essential for planning and preparing for eventual reentry. Women detainees who are to enter Women's Justice Service programs are given a service needs assessment, but there is no mechanism in place to do this with male detainees. Assessment would allow for reentry planning or initiation of services much earlier in the process of detention. In the issue of SSI benefits, for instance, it would target individuals who need assistance in applying for or maintaining their benefits. There may be other special status populations (veterans) that might also benefit.

D. Identification Cards

Detainees often enter the jail with no form of official identification, either because they were not carrying identification at the time of arrest or because their identification was not turned over to the jail when they were transported by police and admitted. Currently, there is no provision for obtaining identification for detainees while they are in jail. When they leave the jail, the lack of identification often presents an obstacle in obtaining treatment or services. The federal REAL Identification Act will increase the need for individuals to possess a driver's license or official state ID. In addition to not having the means to get IDs issued, detainees may not be able to afford the necessary fees – approximately \$20 – to obtain one. The Committee is exploring both aspects of this issue – ID issuance and fees – to find a solution to the problem.

E. Time of Release

Detainees may be released from the jail in the evening or night, depending on when the jail is notified by the court to release the individual and the amount of time necessary to process the discharge. This can result in detainees leaving the jail at a late hour with no immediate transportation or resources for basic needs. If the individual cannot quickly obtain food and shelter, this can have an immediate negative impact for the detainee and for the community as a whole. The Committee will explore the legal and procedural aspects of this issue, and possible options for after-hours services.

F. Availability of Services upon Release

Appropriate services to address needs for mental health and substance abuse treatment, shelter and income need to be immediately accessible for detainees upon reentry to prevent recidivism and stress on the community. The development of capacity to provide accessible services for the diverse, high-need reentering population is a complex issue and not easy to accomplish. The issue is not just development of more services. There needs to be better coordination of elements within the Cook County criminal justice system and with local government and the existing public and private system of services. The Committee will continue to explore opportunities for making services more accessible at jail discharge and strategies for developing capacity at the community and regional levels.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1:

That the Sheriff's Committee on Reentry and the Cook County Department of Corrections collaboratively develop and implement a *Cook County Reentry Resource Guide and Self-Assessment Tool* (for those leaving the jail.) (2-month timeline)

Based on a planning guide developed by the San Francisco Reentry Council, the proposed resource guide would provide information about housing, health, education, employment, human services, probation and other areas of need, in addition to a structured planning tool for detainees and correctional staff to use during incarceration to prepare for reentry. The easy-to-use guide would emphasize individual detainee responsibility in preparing for release, while providing a structured focus for correctional staff working with detainees.

Recommendation 2:

That the Cook County Department of Corrections develop a basic needs screening process for all new detainees entering the jail to prepare for eventual release and community reentry. (2-month timeline)

The screening process (utilizing the resource guide and planning tool described above) would assist detainees in identifying unmet basic needs and available resources. The screening process would identify high risk factors for re-incarceration – individual needs for housing, health services, income and other supports – as a first step in helping detainees prepare for reentry.

The screening process should be implemented as a pilot project with an initial target population of detainees who are in jail under a sentence of 365 days or less. This population is an appropriate size for the pilot and will remain in the custody of the Sheriff throughout their sentence (will not be transferred to IDOC). In addition, these inmates have an identifiable date of release.

Recommendation 3:

That the Cook County Department of Corrections develop an initiative to improve detainee accessibility to SSI, SSA, Medicaid, Veteran's Benefits, and Food Stamps. (3-month timeline)

As a collaborative project involving the Cook County Department of Corrections, the Corporation for Supportive Housing, the Illinois Department of Human Services, and benefits advocates, new detainees would be screened for benefit eligibility, status, and application assistance. Training would be developed and implemented for Correctional Rehabilitation Workers to enable them to screen detainees for eligibility and provide application assistance. Direct communication should be established with the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services in order to provide coordination and channels of communication to facilitate the project.

Recommendation 4:

That the Cook County Sheriff's Office develop means to assist detainees in obtaining necessary official identification prior to leaving jail. (6-month timeline)

This project would develop governmental interagency collaboration and private micro-funding to ensure that about-to-be-released or recently-released detainees are able to obtain a form of official identification.

Recommendation 5:

That data collection and analysis for planning, evaluation and tracking be improved through the creation of a Research & Planning Unit within the Cook County Department of Corrections.

Data collection and analysis need to be improved for many reasons:

- To better understand the characteristics and needs of persons entering and leaving the jail;
- To inform all future planning for the Cook County correctional population;
- To develop better tracking of detainees, particularly frequent recidivists and other high-need detainees;
- To accurately evaluate current programs, including those provided by private vendors;
- To provide a basis for seeking public and private funds for correctional and reentry initiatives.

A Research & Planning Unit, under the direction of an appropriately-credentialed and established researcher, would ensure the collection and availability of all necessary data; stimulate useful research and funding for research; provide an institutional review process for research proposals; prepare annual data reports; ensure appropriate data collection and reporting by vendors; and establish or improve linkages with other data systems, e.g., those of the IDOC, CPD, or Circuit Court. The first priority for the Research & Planning Unit should be to collect and analyze the data of needs screening pilot project described in Recommendation 2.

Recommendation 6:

That the Sheriff formally convene a Legislative Study Commission to review the challenges and opportunities relating to reentry in Cook County and make recommendations for legislation in relation to the Cook County criminal justice system. (1-year time line)

The Legislative Study Commission will seek to make consistent use of the best research on how to remove barriers to successful reentry within the Cook County Department of Corrections. The Commission will map out the steps necessary to remove these barriers. Testimony will be taken in public from recognized experts and decision makers at the relevant agencies. Public comments will be invited and reviewed by the Commission.

Meetings should be held in a neutral, non-governmental space. Loyola University would be an excellent venue in terms of neutrality, location and meeting amenities. The final report will make specific proposals regarding legislation, addressing concerns including a strategy to fill current gaps in needed services, develop interagency coordination and protocols for working with the jail population, build greater community service capacity and promote increased use of private funding for innovations and improvements to the county justice system for persons leaving the jail.

Recommendation 7:

That the Sheriff establish a liaison with the New Communities Programs in neighborhoods particularly affected by the release of detainees in order to open effective lines of communication, increase coordination and support new projects as appropriate. (2-month timeline)

The 16 New Communities Programs are well-funded, multi-year efforts, and they include many of the communities most affected by reentry. This long-term initiative emphasizes community-based planning and development of citywide partnerships to address a wide range of quality-of-life and human service needs, including housing, healthcare, and education.

Appendix A: Steering Group Members

Sue Augustus	Corporation for Supportive Housing
Jennifer Black	Women's Justice Services
Rashanda Carroll	Cook County Department of Corrections
Dr. Elaine Couture	Cermak Hospital
Leonard Evans	Cook County Sheriff's Office
John Fallon	Corporation for Supportive Housing
Dr. Anderson Freeman	Illinois Department of Mental Health
Phillip Hampton	City of Chicago 311 Services
Rebecca Janowitz	Cook County Sheriff's Office
Scott Kurtovich	Cook County Department of Corrections
Richard LaBrie	Cook County Sheriff's Office, DCSI
Terrie McDermot	Women's Justice Services
Robert Mindell	Consultant
Rob Moon	Cook County Sheriff's Office
Kathleen Nee	Cermak Hospital
Dr. David Olson	Loyola University Chicago
Alvin Rider, Jr.	Office of the President, Cook Co. Board of Commissioners
Angela Rudolph	Office of the Mayor of Chicago
Dr. Nicole Saulsberry	Office of the President, Cook Co. Board of Commissioners

**Each of these people contributed to this report and the work of the committee.
Their efforts on behalf of the jail population are deeply appreciated.**