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Governor Chris Christie Takes Action to Help Offenders Successfully Re-Enter Society and Lead Productive Lives

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Governor's Recidivism Initiative Builds on State's Strong Record with Expansion of Successful Drug Court Program, Improved Program Management and Coordination and Accountability for Results

Trenton, NJ – Taking action to build on the nationally recognized success of New Jersey's prisoner re-entry, rehabilitation and prevention programs, Governor Chris Christie today outlined an initiative to help even more offenders get the support they need to successfully re-enter society, break the cycle of criminality and lead productive lives.

Governor Christie outlined this cross-departmental Administration initiative at Cathedral Kitchen, a community service organization that serves meals to those in need in Camden. Cathedral Kitchen operates a culinary arts program which gives job training to unemployed, unskilled, homeless citizens, re-entering prisoners and parolees, helping them transition to a successful, productive life once they are out of prison.

The Governor's re-entry initiative includes the expansion of the state's successful Drug Court Program, the appointment of a Governor's Office Re-entry Coordinator, the creation of a Governor's Task Force on Recidivism Reduction, an ongoing program assessment, and the development of a real time recidivism database. These changes will allow New Jersey's re-entry and rehabilitation efforts and programs to work together, to be guided and properly resourced based on results, and to ensure effective programs are expanded to serve as many individuals as possible.

"New Jersey has a strong record of helping rehabilitate offenders and providing the services they need to be successful

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in society, significantly decreasing their likelihood of reoffending and improving public safety,” said Governor Christie. “But we can do better to make our re-entry programs more efficient, successful and effective - helping even more individuals get the support they need to change their lives for the better and break the cycle of offending and reoffending.”

Today, New Jersey is widely recognized as a national leader in reducing incidents of recidivism and reducing its prison population. The Pew Center on the States’ State of Recidivism report, “The Revolving Door of America’s Prisons,” identified New Jersey’s 11 percent recidivism decline as among the steepest declines for any state during the report’s study period, from 1999-2002 and 2004-2007. Since 1999, New Jersey’s prison population has declined more than 20 percent.

New Jersey spends over \$225 million, not including over \$40 million for the Drug Court Program, on its system of various re-entry and prevention programs across state government, but it is done in a decentralized manner with no mechanism to implement these resources strategically or measure program performance. The Governor’s initiative builds on the relative success of New Jersey’s existing system of re-entry programs in breaking the cycle of criminality and helping offenders lead successful lives after prison by addressing existing shortcomings and expanding those programs that are getting results.

Existing programs like the Drug Court Program, which serves as an alternative to incarceration for drug-addicted, nonviolent offenders, have already been effective in reducing recidivism rates among those they serve.

According to their October 2010 Drug Court Report, the rate at which drug court graduates are re-arrested for a new indictable offense is 16% and the reconviction rate is 8%. This is compared to re-arrest rates for drug offenders released from prison that stands at 54% with a re-conviction rate of 43%. According to that report, an average institutional cost per inmate is approximately \$38,900, whereas the cost for an active drug court participant is roughly \$11,379.

The Governor’s initiative will focus additional resources on this successful, demonstrably effective program and allow others to be similarly identified and prioritized to further reduce recidivism with programs that work.

Connecting offenders with the services they need to be successful back in society, whether it is recovery from substance abuse or the need for official identification, is critical to ending the cycle of crime. At present, a joint program between the state Department of Corrections and Motor Vehicles Commission (MVC) identifies qualified offenders on a quarterly basis, who are taken to MVC offices to obtain a driver’s license or non-driver identification card prior to the completion of their sentence. This program takes down impediments to successful re-entry resulting from the lack of official identification, which is often necessary to apply for a job, obtain housing, or connect with critical services like Medicare or food assistance.

“This initiative will build on our strengths by expanding highly successful programs like the Drug Court Program to get

addicted offenders the underlying help they need, while also measuring and reforming or eliminating ineffective programs, and directing our resources in a smart, strategic and coordinated way to those programs that are making a positive difference in changing lives," said Governor Christie.

First Lady Mary Pat Christie has made re-entry and prevention programs that help ex-offenders and recovering addicts return to normal life a priority. New Jersey's innovative prevention and re-entry programs aimed towards at-risk populations have been highlighted by Mrs. Christie for their work in providing the building blocks to self-sufficiency and a pathway to achieve life success. Several of the initiatives have brought recognition to the Garden State as a national model for the progress made in this area. An overview of Mrs. Christie's efforts in this area can be found [here](#).

The Governor's initiative includes the following components:

Expansion of the Drug Court Program

The drug courts presently accept approximately 1,400 new participants per year. Those new participants must volunteer for a sentence of drug court as opposed to incarceration. The Christie Administration initiative seeks to expand the drug court program by identifying eligible drug addicted non-violent offenders, providing them with clinical assessments to determine their suitability for drug court and sentencing those offenders to the drug court program regardless of their desire to enter the program.

This approach recognizes that one of the main impediments to treatment for addiction is the denial of addiction. Treatment systems that address the denial issue can ultimately be successful in treating a larger population of appropriate offenders. The Governor's Re-entry Task Force will be tasked with working with the judiciary to facilitate a suitable expansion of this program beginning with two vicinages to be determined through this effort.

Governor's Office Coordinator for Prisoner Reentry

A collaborative vision is necessary to improve what is a comparatively successful system of re-entry services. That vision includes, as a first phase, centralizing and providing a formal management structure on the current, decentralized system.

Governor Christie today announced that Lisa Puglisi, an attorney with more than a decade of experience with the Attorney General's Office representing the Department of Corrections and later the State Parole Board, as his Coordinator for Prisoner Re-entry to convey and implement the Governor's vision for an improved prisoner re-entry scheme. The Governor's Coordinator for Prisoner Re-entry will co-chair the Task Force for Recidivism Reduction and serve as the principle policy adviser to the Governor on re-entry and recidivism reduction policy.

The Governor's Task Force for Recidivism Reduction

There are more than just Corrections and Parole pieces to maintain and improve on the state's public safety and prisoner re-entry mission. To address the current lack of coordination among the many treatment and reentry programs across state government, Governor Christie today signed Executive Order 83, creating the Governor's Task Force for Recidivism Reduction.

The Task Force will be led by both the Chairman of the State Parole Board, James Plousis, and the Governor's Coordinator for Prisoner Re-entry. Its members will include representatives from:

- Department of Corrections
- State Parole Board
- Motor Vehicle Commission
- Department of Human Services
- Department of Health and Senior Services
- Department of Military and Veterans Affairs
- Department of Law & Public Safety
- Juvenile Justice Commission
- Department of Community Affairs

The Task Force will develop recommendations for the Governor regarding how best to ensure the effectiveness and success of New Jersey's efforts towards recidivism reduction, including an initial benchmarking study of existing program effectiveness and performance, and the development and implementation of a system to measure program effectiveness in an ongoing, real-time way.

Day-to-day implementation of the Governor's initiative will be led by the State Parole Board Chairman Plousis, including the ongoing elements of the proposal such as collecting and analyzing performance data from various state departments for budgeting, programming and procurement purposes.

Ongoing Program Assessment and Measurement

The Governor's Re-entry Coordinator and Task Force will work to facilitate a professional benchmarking assessment that will evaluate the effectiveness of all re-entry programs offered. The path forward to improve prisoner re-entry requires the Administration to gauge the successes, failures and the depth of gaps in program delivery – inside and outside of prison.

Programming gaps will be rectified by expanding existing, successful programs and hitting capacity thresholds, particularly relating to program delivery within prison. With the parallel development of the real-time recidivism database, this assessment will remain an ongoing accountability tool, allowing the Administration to identify and remediate or eliminate poor performing programs, ensuring that resources are directed to the most effective and

successful programs.

Real-Time Recidivism Database

After the program assessment is completed, that data will be used to populate a database, which will allow the Administration to track outcomes for individuals and trends and level of effectiveness in programs in a real-time manner.

This project is currently in development through the efforts of the State Parole Board, Department of Corrections, the Juvenile Justice Commission, Department of Law & Public Safety, the Office of Information Technology and Rutgers University.

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