

# Reentry Action Plan Update

June 4, 2021

There are six (6) key components of the Reentry Action Plan that, with the assistance of other stakeholders, can greatly assist individuals with their reentry process. This update explains the progress of each component of the Reentry Action Plan since the Plan was first announced in February 2018.

## Component 1: Create a State Reentry Council Collaborative

In 2017, to create the SRCC, the Secretary of DPS directed staff to complete the following tasks, all of which have been completed:

1. Develop a membership list for the SRCC as outlined in Section 16.10 of SL 2017-57, to include those required members and other stakeholders as deemed appropriate by the Secretary.
2. Convene an initial meeting of the SRCC.
3. Develop a list of potential SRCC workgroups, identify participants, and gather contact information, areas of interest, and names of participants interested in leadership roles.
4. Discuss the needs of formerly incarcerated individuals and identify methods to strengthen local reentry councils (LRC).

The SRCC workgroups included 1. Housing, 2. Transportation, 3. Education and Vocational Training, 4. Employment, 5. Mental Health, Substance Misuse, and Medical, 6. Faith/Community-Based Organizations, 7. Legal, 8. Family Reunification, 9. Advocacy, and 10. Women and Incarceration. These workgroups' recommendations were finalized in late 2018. In late 2018, SRCC staff also developed four implementation teams: Legislative, Executive, Local/Community, and Communications/Awareness. Each of these teams has met regularly since early 2019 to determine priority recommendations and begin implementing them. The full SRCC has also met quarterly since early 2018 to give updates on recommendation development and implementation, and to educate the SRCC on reentry issues and solutions. NCDPS submitted annual reports on the SRCC's progress to the NCGA and the Governor on November 1, 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020.

## Component 2: Develop Detailed Implementation Components of the Reentry Action Plan

Many key components of the Reentry Action Plan have seen progress, including:

1. **Collaboration among key reentry stakeholders.** To date, this has included TREC support of all SRCC recommendations, the initiation of a Prison Education Collaborative between NCDPS and the Community College System, the collaboration between the Local Reentry Councils and other reentry service providers and with NCDPS, and the collaboration of multiple departments to produce deliverables created by Three Flights, LLC.
2. **Development of a knowledge base to inform future reentry policies or legislation.** In April 2021, the SRCC Communications Implementation Team finalized several documents to inform various audiences of current legislation and build a knowledge base of stakeholders informed about reentry issues and more amenable to giving people second chances.

3. **Review of policies, programs, and procedures to create more pathways to opportunity for people with criminal records.** Both the Second Chance Act (HB 562) and the Fair Chance Hiring Executive Order (EO 158) were signed in 2020.
4. **Review of state licensing procedures to eliminate barriers to employment.** The SRCC Employment Workgroup recommended that the NCGA enact a statute requiring all licensing boards to remove subjective terms, such as “good moral character” and “moral turpitude,” as a licensing or certification requirement. With the support of the Legislative Implementation team, [HB 770](#), which fulfills this recommendation, was signed into law on July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019.
5. **An annual report to the Legislature and the Governor on the progress of the reentry initiative.** Annual reports on the SRCC’s progress were submitted on November 1, 2017, November 1, 2018, November 1, 2019, and November 1, 2020. An SRCC Final Report document was submitted in April 2019. Reentry Status Reports were also submitted in June 2018 and June 2019.

### **Component 3: Provide Capacity Building and Technical Support to Local Reentry Councils**

Continued capacity building and development on the part of DPS Reentry, Programs & Services has resulted in a steady increase in the number and functioning of LRCs. As of early 2021, there are 17 Local Reentry Councils covering 19 counties, all of which receive state and/or federal funding: Buncombe, Craven/Pamlico, Cumberland, Durham, Forsyth, Guilford, Hoke, McDowell, Mecklenburg, Nash/Edgecombe, New Hanover, Orange, Pitt, Robeson, Scotland, Wake, and Wilson. Additionally, 17 counties are in the beginning stages of forming a reentry council and are not funded sites: Bladen, Carteret, Catawba, Cleveland, Davidson, Halifax/Northampton, Iredell/Alexander, Johnston, Moore, Richmond, Rockingham, Rowan, Rutherford, Transylvania, Vance/Granville, Watauga, and Wayne.

In terms of strategic planning to benefit LRCs, in 2020, the Reentry team at Reentry, Programs & Services produced Standard Operating Procedure documents, an LRC Guide, and a Community Development Specialist Guide to help guide their operations. In addition, Three Flights, LLC, a consulting firm, completed a two-part project:

1. A landscape scan of local reentry services, which entailed identifying one or more reentry point people and organizations in each county and conducting interviews with reentry experts, resulting in a Reentry Database with over 500 reentry contacts throughout North Carolina.
2. A report outlining specific strategies state stakeholders could implement to better coordinate and support local reentry efforts.

DPS hopes to receive money to support more LRCs. The Governor’s FY 2021-22 budget proposal includes operational support for LRCs and an additional CDS position.

Finally, potential local reentry councils convened at NCDPS RP&S in fall 2019 where they shared information and needs, and discussed how to collaborate better regardless of whether more LRC funding becomes available. Reentry, Programs & Services is also planning a Reentry Conference for spring 2022 for reentry stakeholders from across the state, including but not limited to LRCs.

#### **Component 4: Expand and Formalize Involvement of Faith-Based and Community-Based Organizations in Reentry**

The Governor's directive for increasing faith and community-based organizations' involvement in reentry had less to do with formal policy changes and more with facilitating informal connections between justice-involved people and faith-based and community organizations. DPS already has numerous connections with faith-based organizations, which offer a multitude of services to incarcerated people.

One of the purposes of the Reentry Summit on March 12, 2019 was to host a session where faith-based and community-based organizations could meet with others from their geographic area, learn more about what each other's organizations were doing, and develop reentry priorities for their region of the state. At the Summit, eleven such groups met in a session called "Call to Action". Several of these groups had follow-up meetings after the Summit, and all of the groups were encouraged to become involved in their Local Reentry Council, if there is one in their area. Additionally, as part of Three Flights' project, they reached out to everyone on the list of registered Reentry Summit attendees as a starting point in developing their statewide NC Reentry Database.

Many of these service providers also work with formerly incarcerated people through the Local Reentry Councils. In addition, the SRCC Faith-Based workgroup played a role in hosting the Reentry Summit on March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019 in Greensboro, NC, one goal of which was to create a space for facilitating these connections. (Plans for a 2020 summit were canceled due to COVID-19). DPS also continues to foster such connections in the course of starting more LRCs and continuing to talk to counties interested in starting LRCs about including these organizations in their work.

The existing network of faith-based organizations is strong. We utilize many pilot programs at reentry facilities, including a grant to partner with Coastal Horizons on a parenting program. We also recently expanded the policy for Custodial Agent Training at designated reentry facilities to make it more flexible, allowing volunteers to do more reentry activities with people close to release. DPS tries to ensure that all the programs that are used in prisons are evidence-based, and they develop MOUs to ensure that DPS policies are followed when outside groups bring their programs inside prisons. DPS does not, however, have formal standards to evaluate outside programs.

DPS will continue to explore ways to make better use of our existing relationships with these organizations, including utilizing the Reentry Database produced by Three Flights (described above), hosting more Reentry Conferences, and hosting smaller regional reentry convenings, so that these organizations have opportunities to share best practices more effectively.

#### **Component 5: Resolve Warrants and Pending Charges Prior to Release (SL-2015-48)**

The resolutions of pending charges prior to release gained increased urgency with the increased use of the Extended Limits of Confinement (ELC) program at NCDPS, which has allowed some people to finish their prison sentences at home during the COVID pandemic. DPS, DIT, and the Judicial Branch have worked together on a pilot project to address this issue. In the pilot project, CJLEADS provided a list of people with pending charges who are slated for release between April 2021 and April 2022 to District Attorneys for their review. Local district attorneys retain discretion to determine how or whether to dispose of pending charges and outstanding warrants. This process will increase efficiency and aid in reentry planning by streamlining the process to address pending charges.

## Component 6: Address Major Reentry Barriers with the Assistance of Multiple Stakeholders

Employment, housing, transportation, and substance use/mental health treatment are the four major barriers that the original Reentry Action Plan identified that would have a significant positive impact on reentry outcomes if successfully addressed. Progress has been made in each of these areas:

### Employment

1. On 8/18/20, Governor Cooper signed [Executive Order 158](#), which prohibits state agencies from inquiring into an individual's criminal history during the initial stages of the hiring process, and requires them to remove criminal history questions from its employment applications.
2. District attorneys representing Rockingham, Caswell, Durham, Mecklenburg, New Hanover, Pender, Chatham, and Orange counties have filed or are in the process of filing motions to expunge the records of people who were convicted of low-level, non-violent felonies and misdemeanors eligible for relief under Section 1 of the Second Chance Act ([SB 562](#)). More info on the SCA can be found here: <https://ncsecondchance.org/thesecondchanceact/>. These expunctions will help thousands of North Carolinians expunge their criminal records, thereby helping them acquire employment and housing.
3. [HB 463](#) became law on 6/30/20. This law includes repealing the prohibition on the utilization of state funds for community college training in prisons and removing the prohibition on courses in local jails from earning regular budget full-time equivalents. These new educational opportunities will hopefully give incarcerated people more employment opportunities once they're released.

### Housing

Denise Neunaber and Erika Ferguson have given a couple presentations on Back@Home NC, which utilizes networks and procedures built post-Hurricane Florence to work with individuals and families to locate and move into housing during the current housing crisis exacerbated by COVID. They will work with DPS and LRCs to determine how agencies and community-based organizations can best utilize that program.

### Transportation

1. The [ncfairchance.org](http://ncfairchance.org) website was finalized in July 2020. Through this website, the NC Pro Bono Resource Center is serving anyone who asks for their driving record to be reviewed.
2. Signed on 7/1/20, [SB 488](#), Section 6.5 Amends GS 20-24.1 to allow people with a license revoked only for failure to pay fines to apply to the court for a limited driving privilege valid for up to one year or until any fine, penalty, or court costs ordered by the court are paid.

### Substance Use and Mental Health Treatment/Aftercare

1. NCDPS has an ongoing partnership with the NC FIT program, which currently serves Wake, Orange, Durham, Guilford, and Mecklenburg counties.
2. The Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice (DACJJ) and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) was awarded funding through the State Opioid Response grant in summer 2019.

## **Conclusion**

The agencies participating in implementing this Reentry Action Plan continue to explore ways to bring these priorities and recommendations to the forefront of their work in the form of presentations, grants, administrative prioritization, and collaboration in response to emerging reentry needs. We will continue to add local reentry councils and develop their capacity as funding allows, convene the SRCC quarterly in order to provide feedback on those groups' progress, and develop ways to utilize our faith-based partners in reentry work. We will also continue the project to review pending charges prior to release, with the ultimate goal of automating that process. Since the Task Force on Racial Equity in the Criminal Justice System (TREC) supports the SRCC recommendations, we anticipate that those two groups will continue to collaborate on legislative and communications goals.