

Ohio Poverty Law Center Prisoner Reentry Project

The Ohio Poverty Law Center has launched a project in prisoner reentry. The project is a two-year Equal Justice Works fellowship focused on adult and juvenile prisoner reentry in Ohio. Post-release individuals (PRIs) are negatively effected by many legal issue areas, including: housing, employment, child custody, domestic violence, education and job training, health care, public benefits, and expungement.

Dealing with the volume and variety of issues faced by PRIs is a challenge, for both the individuals themselves and service providers. This is one cause of Ohio's recidivism rate of nearly 2/3 within three years of release. To begin to address the problems faced by PRIs, we are compiling a list of currently available programs in Ohio focused on reentry, as to not duplicate valuable work already completed.

PRIs face changing issues as time passes after their release. For recently released PRIs and the agencies/service providers working with them, we plan to develop seminars/materials detailing programs, resources, and other helpful information to make the prison to community transition less difficult. We also plan to provide legal services attorneys with assistance and information to help them tailor their intake and services to better serve PRIs in a comprehensive manner. Additionally, we plan to build on Columbus Legal Aid's work, including reentry clinics for releasees, Work Opportunity Tax Credit meet & greets with interested employers, and Benefit Bank enrollment.

For those who manage to avoid recidivism, their needs are probably more focused on family law and legislative issues, as they are likely to have attained some success in obtaining housing and employment. To address the needs of these PRIs we plan to work to support legislation that may favorably amend Ohio's currently restrictive expungement laws. Less formally, we hope to help make policy changes that bring an end to the current trend of continual punishment and deprivation of rights and privileges because of felony convictions.

We also plan to provide indigent defenders (public and private) with a more thorough understanding of the civil ramifications faced by releasees and exoffenders through preparation and distribution of material and seminars. Lastly, we hope to do a fairly small amount of direct client representation in any of the aforementioned issue areas affecting PRIs.

We hope that this project can make a lasting difference to Ohioans who have been incarcerated and to the organizations and professionals who assist them. We want to work with others across the state and learn from their experience. We hope we can work with you to make a change.

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