

**Connecticut Legislature**  
**Judiciary Committee Public Hearing**  
**November 27, 2007**

**Family ReEntry's Testimony**  
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**Abstract:** Family ReEntry is interested in assisting the State develop effective sustainable solutions to the challenges of reentry thereby decreasing recidivism and ensuring public safety. Together, reliable offender assessment, comprehensive community supervision and effective reentry programs increase public safety. The most effective response to the complexity of prisoner reentry is a coordinated response. Three critical components of developing, implementing, and maintaining effective reentry strategies are: (1) adequate investment in the evolution of reentry program models; (2) application of the research findings and recommendations from these reentry pilot programs to inform policy and practice; and (3) supporting collaborative linkages among all stakeholders including State agencies, private funders, nonprofit providers, community groups, municipal governments, academic and research institutions, and victim advocates.

**Urgent Request:** Family ReEntry requests that the Legislature approve funding this fiscal year to complete the three-reentry pilot projects in Bridgeport (**Fresh Start: Community Reentry Program "Coming Home for Good"**). The full operational cost of the program is \$500,000 per year. \$225,000 is needed this fiscal year with assurances of \$500,000 in the 2008/2009 fiscal year. Without these funds drastic cuts will need to be made immediately, prior state investment of \$775,000 will be wasted, and the project will not afford the State any useful data. Allocation of these funds will equalize funding among the three State reentry pilot projects in Hartford, New Haven, and Bridgeport with each program receiving approximately 1.5 million dollars over three years to develop and implement effective reentry program.

**Participants:**

1. Steve Lanza, Executive Director of Family ReEntry
2. Kenneth R. Jackson, Director of the Beacon Program and Ex-Offender Community Leader
3. Dr. Derrick Gordon, Principal Investigator, Yale University, School of Medical Department of Psychiatry
4. Sally Schenk, President, Board of Directors Family ReEntry

**Outline of Testimony:**

**Steve Lanza** will speak on the importance of completing all three reentry pilot projects and on supporting collaborative linkages among all stakeholders. Efforts to date will be mentioned and urgent needs will be stressed.

**Kenneth R. Jackson** will speak on the importance of utilizing successful ex-offenders in the reentry process and supporting successful ex-offenders as positive role models for at-risk youth and as community leaders.

**Dr. Gordon** will be available to answer questions on the research findings and trends to date for both the Bridgeport and New Haven reentry pilot projects.

**Sally Schenk** will be available to address questions on the value of a public-private sector partnership, on the importance of adequate State funding to leverage significant private dollars, and on the Delancey Street model.

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**First Speaker: Steve Lanza**

Good afternoon and thank you for this opportunity and your hard work on these complex issues. I am Steve Lanza, Executive Director of Family ReEntry. With me today are: Kenneth R. Jackson, Director of the Beacon Mentoring Program, successful ex-offender, and community leader; Dr. Derrick Gordon Principal Investigator, from Yale University; and Sally Schenk, President of the Board of Family ReEntry.

Family ReEntry launched one of the three prisoner reentry pilot projects initiated as a result of the Building Bridges efforts. Our Bridgeport program, titled **Fresh Start** is now in its second year of a three year project. Preliminary results from the Yale University research are very promising.

It is clear that effective reentry programs:

1. **Increase public safety**
2. **Break the cycle of recidivism**
3. **Reduce the cost of criminal justice and incarceration**

We have two principal recommendations:

**Recommendation # 1**

**Ensure Adequate Three-Year Funding of all the Reentry Pilot Projects in the State**

Unlike the New Haven and Hartford projects, **Fresh Start** in Bridgeport is not fully funded this fiscal year. The current gap of **\$225,000** must be filled immediately to ensure that the State's investment of \$775,000 will not be wasted. Without immediate funding the program will be compromised.

**Recommendation # 2**

**Coordinate All Stakeholders through a Statewide Commission on Reentry**

All stakeholders must be represented, including the non-profit and private sectors.

**Fresh Start** is an innovative program and part of a bigger vision for community change:

- We are starting ex-offender entrepreneurial businesses – without public money
- We are changing neighborhood norms by creating positive role-models
- The program inspires the grass-root community leadership of ex-offenders – like Kenny Jackson.....

**Second Speaker: Kenny R. Jackson** (summary)

I am Kenneth Jackson, former offender and now leading the ex-offender community in efforts to break the cycle incarceration. Together with the **Fresh Start** Program we are creating a community of successful ex-offenders and helping them to become community leaders and positive role models and mentors for those reentering from prison and for the at-risk youth in their communities. We are working to reach a tipping-point when enough successful ex-offenders can create enough momentum to stop the negative cycle and set new positive goals for their communities. Ex-offenders must be at the table. No one know better than an ex-offender what the challenges of reentry are and how to best overcome these challenges.

I urge you to support the continued funding of **Fresh Start** and give ex-offenders a second chance and an opportunity to help break the cycle.