Policy Proposal for the Lack of Prisoner Reentry Programs for Ex-Offenders

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While decreasing recidivism rates and keeping the community at large safe, prisoner reentry programs are crucial to the success of keeping ex-offenders out of trouble. The overall concept of prisoner reentry programs is to help in the process of ex-offenders integrating back into society, as life after prison can be extremely challenging and can hold many uncertainties for individuals who have been incarcerated for a long period of time. The current lack of effective prisoner reentry programs in the United States stems from a lack of funding and a misunderstanding surrounding those who were recently released from prison (Jonson & Cullen, 2015). This presents itself as a major policy problem due to the mere fact that ex-offenders are being deprived of services that they are so rightfully entitled to receive, as everyone deserves the right to obtaining social justice. To further emphasize the need for effective reentry programs, this policy proposal that follows will address the steps that need to be taken in order to create real change for ex-offenders so that they can easily integrate back into society as well as find sustainable jobs.

Historically, the reentry movement presents itself as a newer concept due to it becoming more prevalent in the last decade than it ever has before (Jonson & Cullen, 2015). This is mainly due to the fact that the number of released inmates annually is roughly 600,000 (Jonson & Cullen, 2015). With this statistic alone, it shows the demand for effective reentry programs for these ex-offenders. The term "reentry movement" stands for the focus on developing programs to facilitate the successful return of ex-offenders back into the community (Jonson & Cullen, 2015). It is crucial to emphasize the need for reentry programs as it also has ties with rehabilitation, and helps keep offenders out of a life of violence, drugs, or crime (Jonson & Cullen, 2015). Whether inside the prison or on the outside, prisoners will face a great deal of personal or situational risks

and issues that if left unaddressed, will eventually lead them back into a life of crime (Jonson & Cullen, 2015).

       In order to organize an effective legislative policy project such as creating more effective prisoner reentry programs through funding and support, it is crucial to follow the six steps that will help support one's advocacy for change. To start, the first step would be to organize a team or a coalition who would be willing to advocate alongside you (Jansson, 2018). Policy advocates must put together an organized group that will push for the drive toward the enactment of the legislative proposal, which in this case, a team would need to all push for the funding of more effective prisoner reentry programs (Jansson, 2018). The team will also need to create a unified and effective strategy that is organized and shows their drive for change so that it can eventually be presented to legislators who have the power to implement and change policies (Jansson, 2018). For the purpose of this policy proposal paper, to begin with the implementation of policy change, organizing a team with ex-offenders who have already reintegrated into society may be beneficial as this brings a personal aspect to the drive for change. Bringing them along and having them advocate in settings where they can speak about their own personal experiences with the current reentry programs may help push legislators to want to create more effective reentry programs and find the funding to do so.

       The next step in organizing this specific legislative policy project is implemented through establishing policy goals in a legislative context, and deciding on what specific kinds of policy changes should be sought out (Jansson, 2018). In this instance, the team would be pushing to add onto previously established legislation, meaning the team would be focusing on improving the foundation for what is already implemented (Jansson, 2018). With health, employment, and housing all being major issues for ex-offenders once they are released, it is important to create

short term and long term reforms to present to legislators. Some examples of a short term

solution would be the ending of restrictions on occupational licenses, safety net programs, and

hiring those with criminal records (Goger & Hendersen, 2022). Another example of effective

change would be pushing for increased funding subsidized employment programs and American

job centers (Goger & Hendersen, 2022). Also, establishing pre release education and work based

learning programs while serving their time in prison will lead to an increased chance of reentry

programs becoming more effective (Goger & Hendersen, 2022). A more long term goal would

be to reorient and evaluate current parole services as they should be offering even more support

to ex-offenders, and be able to provide them with resources that they made need to better their

situations (Goger & Hendersen, 2022). Overall, it would be important to first find out the

legislators willingness to compromise as it is important to have their full support in order to put

this implementations in place (Jansson, 2018).

When writing the policy brief on this matter, it would be important to address the current

problems and concerns surrounding current prisoner reentry programs (Jansson, 2018). In other

words, it would be beneficial to provide an analysis of the existing programs and laws

surrounding them (Jansson, 2018). By doing this, legislators can visibly see the issues at hand.

Included in this policy brief would also be a wide array of potential remedies that could help in

the current lacking of funding for these programs. A potential remedy would include increasing

access to services in relation to issues for ex-offenders such as housing, mental health and

addiction services, employment, and social reintegration (Goger & Hendersen, 2022). Also,

including potential objections along with their rebuttals in this policy brief would be beneficial as

this would prepare the team for potential debate with legislators (Jansson, 2018). A potential

objection to this issue might be potential concern surrounding funding, where the legislators

might feel strongly against pushing for funding towards reentry programs as they may feel the funding should be provided elsewhere. A rebuttal for this concern would be that by providing more funding towards effective prisoner reentry programs, then the community as a whole would be safer due to recidivism rates decreasing as a result.

In order to grab the attention of policy makers, in this case, it would be beneficial to prepare ex-offenders on the team to tell their stories, as well as include the alarming statistics in relation to recidivism rates (Goger & Hendersen, 2022). Getting attention from the press would also be helpful in this instance in order to show the communities in which these ex-offenders live in that they are trying to create change for the better (Jansson, 2018). By utilizing reentry programs, crime within neighborhoods can decrease, keeping the peace between neighbors and ex-offenders. This would be important and useful information to release to the public, and can work in the favor of these ex-offenders. It has been documented that recidivism rates have significantly increased over the past ten years during the prisoner reentry movement, however, they have not decreased nearly enough as to where they should be (Goger & Hendersen, 2022). Lobbying, demonstrations, and letter writing would be effective in this case if the ex-offenders told their success stories, as this might push the public and the community to want to help with funding (Jansson, 2018). In this instance, testifying at hearings may also help in ex-offenders' favor, and would be utilized throughout this policy plan in order to hold legislators accountable in person (Jansson, 2018). Keeping a clear and concise plan is critical as it is important to remain organized and driven. Having an organized plan in place lets everyone know their roles, as well as what needs to be done in order to continue to find more funding for reentry programs. Also, having a strategy is useful as there are a few steps in implementing an effective strategy. In this

instance, a good strategy might be to approach legislative staff as well as lobby legislators (Jansson, 2018).

Pushing for more funding and solutions such a pell grant program for ex-offenders who were just released can further help decrease recidivism rates (Mercer, 2009). In some states in the U.S., pell grants are issued to prisoners who are trying to integrate smoothly back into society (Mercer, 2009). This is known as the Pell Grant Act and it has been shown to help in the decrease of recidivism rates in multiple states (Mercer, 2009). Ex-offenders often utilize these pell grants to further their education and rehabilitative programs, and has been shown to be extremely effective. Finding the funding however for these pell grants has presented challenges, as the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, put a halt to the receiving of pell grant funds (Mercer, 2009). It has been shown that public support for funding is hard to come by due to the public wanting their federal tax dollars to go elsewhere (Mercer, 2009). As a result, it has been left up to the states and their prison systems to find other ways to receive funding, whether that be through private funding or through state funds (Mercer, 2009). After the passage of this act, recidivism rates took a turn for the worse (Mercer, 2009). Lobbying for this act through the utilization of ex-offenders own personal stories, letter writing, media coverage and more can all be beneficial in pushing for funding for pell grants. Attending hearings would also be very beneficial and effective.

Another program that could be effective in this instance is a peer mentor program for ex-offenders who want to help newer ex-offenders find their way out of the prison system. By putting a program in place such as this one, what was not learned in the programs within the prisons can be taught by individuals who have the personal experience and knowledge to share with others (Cook et al., 2008). Pushing for a long-term and highly structured program such as

the peer mentor program would provide ex-offenders with support from other ex-offenders, and would hopefully push them to work together and help one another out with finding jobs, housing, and health services. In order to push for this program, it would be beneficial to prepare a presentation to the key stakeholders as they have the power to implement the desired policy change (Jansson, 2018). The statistics for prisoner reentry programs are undeniable, because with effective programs in place, ex-offenders are more likely to be able to integrate back into society with concerns of re committing crimes (Cook et al., 2008). Having a system where ex-offenders can support one another and guide each other in the right direction will continue to decrease recidivism rates. Reaching out to allies who may be able to support a program such as this one would be crucial in the process of creating an effective "buddy system" program. Utilizing different persuasion methods would also be beneficial in this instance, and through the utilization of ex-offenders success stories, this might provide legislators with enough information to want to implement change for the better. It would be important to educate the ex-offenders on what tactics they can use to persuade legislators when telling their stories, which may include educating them on how to maintain a firm and professional tone throughout their presentation. They would need to be personable as well as passionate about implementing this policy change so that they are better able to reintegrate back into society. They would also need to know their audiences and be able to adjust their stories accordingly. It is also crucial to always promote the concept of social justice, as everyone is deserving of being advocated and fought for.

Overall, there are various strategies and ways to go about implementing policy change. The most important part of implementing policy change is how one goes about it. Having an issue in mind, a goal to fix that issue, and the drive to want to implement change through various strategies can take one far in the process of creating real change. Ex-offenders face many

challenges after prison, as most states do not support their integration back into society. However, it is not impossible to change their minds and get them on board with the request for a policy change. Having the drive and skills in place to want to fix the issue of the major lack in effective prisoner reentry programs can create room for change for those who have little to no support to begin with.

References

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