

Policy and Practice Guidance for the Future of Reentry

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The Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center helps leaders in every state design and implement solutions for complex justice system challenges and make communities safer and healthier. We deliver trusted data, practical strategies, and cross-systems collaboration to create second chances, reduce harm, and transform lives.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
About This Guide	1
Principle 1: Integrated Coordination Across Courts, Corrections, and Community Supervision	2
A. Build capacity for collaboration and improved outcomes.	2
B. Use a human-centered approach to set goals and coordinate across systems.	3
Resources	5
Principle 2: Access to Safe, Stable Housing	5
A. Collaborate to break down silos across systems.	6
B. Assess people universally for homelessness risk.	6
C. Connect people to evidence-based housing solutions fairly.	7
D. Expand the available housing supply.	7
Resources	8
Principle 3: Economic Mobility and Meaningful Employment	9
A. Examine collateral consequences in licensing and hiring decisions.	9
B. Integrate reentry and workforce development strategies.	10
C. Engage employers in hiring people with criminal records.	10
D. Minimize debt accrual.	11
Resources	11
Principle 4: Pre- and Post-release Educational Opportunities	12
A. Increase access to education.	12
B. Improve educational opportunities.	13
C. Provide incentives to participate in and complete educational programs.	13
Resources	14
Principle 5: Comprehensive Health and Behavioral Health Treatment and Care	14
A. Strengthen and formalize cross-system collaboration.	15
B. Improve local capacity to collect and share data.	15
C. Increase local diversion as early as possible.	15
D. Build connections to community care and services.	16
Resources	17
Principle 6: Strong Families and Social Networks	17
A. Build family and social connections.	18
Resources	19
Principle 7: Access to Relief Mechanisms to Mitigate Barriers	19
A. Expand relief pathways to remove barriers.	20
Resources	20

Introduction

The majority of people entering jails and prisons already face serious challenges—and without the right support, those challenges often grow worse after release. Because most incarcerated people will eventually return to their communities, ensuring successful reentry has become a top priority for state leaders.

With support from programs like the Second Chance Act and collaboration with a wide range of community partners, state leaders have made meaningful progress in reducing recidivism. Recent data shows that state-level reincarceration rates are 23 percent lower than they were in 2008, underscoring efforts to reduce reliance on incarceration and advance sustainable approaches to public safety.¹ Still, reentry success is about more than reducing rearrest

rates. Many reentry supports and services remain fragmented, inequitable, and under-resourced.

To build on past efforts, **Reentry 2030** was launched in 2022 as a national initiative to improve and expand fair, effective reentry outcomes for people leaving prison or under community supervision. Reentry 2030 works with state leaders, corrections agencies, service providers, and community organizations to set and pursue bold, public reentry goals.

Successfully addressing the systemic barriers to reentry requires a multifaceted approach. This guide outlines policies and practices that state leaders can champion, fund, or implement to ensure that every person returning to the community has a real opportunity to succeed.

About This Guide

Through our work, we've gained direct insight into the policies, practices, and programs that meaningfully improve reentry outcomes and transform lives. In close collaboration with the Reentry 2030 Advisory Board—which includes people with lived experience of incarceration and reentry, along with agency leaders, practitioners, and service providers—we've refined a set of guiding principles that shape the initiative's direction. This diverse group ensures that Reentry 2030 remains grounded in both expertise and experience, with a focus on building a reentry system that promotes fair and lasting reintegration.

This guide is structured around seven core principles that, when pursued together, can foster a reentry system that is coordinated, transparent, equitable, and centered on human dignity:

1. Integrated coordination across courts, corrections, and community supervision
2. Access to safe, stable housing
3. Economic mobility and meaningful employment
4. Pre- and post-release educational opportunities
5. Comprehensive health and behavioral health treatment and care
6. Strong families and social networks
7. Access to relief mechanisms to mitigate barriers

Each section outlines actionable strategies for advancing these principles, featuring real-world examples from state, local, and national efforts as well as additional resources that offer evidence-informed insights and implementation tools.

¹ Marshall Clement et al, *The 50-State Report on Public Safety: One Goal* (New York: CSG Justice Center, 2024), <https://csgjusticecenter.org/publications/50-states-1-goal/>.

In this guide, “state leaders” refers broadly to correctional administrators and heads of state agencies overseeing health, behavioral health, housing, workforce, and education, as well as elected officials.

For states beginning their Reentry 2030 journey, the [Roadmap to Reentry 2030: Three Things States Can Do to Get Started](#) offers a focused entry point, distilling the broader set of policy and practice recommendations into a practical, strategic starting place.

Principle I: Integrated Coordination Across Courts, Corrections, and Community Supervision

A coordinated justice system is essential for successful reentry.

Reentry outcomes improve when courts, corrections, supervision agencies, and community organizations work together toward shared goals. This principle emphasizes the importance of collaboration, human-centered planning, and systems alignment to promote

seamless transitions for people leaving incarceration. The strategies below demonstrate how state leaders can embed this principle into policy and practice.

A. Build capacity for collaboration and improved outcomes.

- Codify a multiagency body or commission to regularly assess—and recommend improvements to—outcomes for the returning population.
 - See [North Carolina Joint Reentry Council](#): A Reentry 2030 statewide network bringing together justice, workforce, and community partners to strengthen reentry coordination and improve outcomes across North Carolina.
 - See [Washington Statewide Reentry Council](#): Brings together statewide leaders from corrections, social services, and community groups to set strategy, monitor progress, and drive accountability for reentry outcomes.
- Develop intergovernmental and community partnerships to ensure a warm handoff for everyone exiting incarceration, including partnerships with grassroots organizations that work closest to the communities served but often struggle to compete with larger organizations for funding.
 - See [California Ride Home Program](#): A community-led initiative that meets people at the prison gates, providing immediate transportation, basic necessities, and support to ease their transition home.
- Create standards to identify and use only those reentry programs that demonstrate effectiveness; evidence-based programs should use sound practices and show positive outcomes.
 - See [Delaware Recidivism Blueprint](#): A comprehensive state plan outlining data-driven strategies to reduce recidivism, improve reentry coordination, and strengthen community-based supports for people returning to the community.
 - See [Delaware Department of Correction Reentry Planning Policy](#): A policy framework ensuring that every person nearing release receives a coordinated reentry plan that links correctional programming with housing, employment, health care, and supervision supports in the community.

- See [Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction Approved Reentry Program Criteria](#): A set of statewide standards defining evidence-based practices and outcome measures that reentry programs must meet to be certified, ensuring quality, consistency, and accountability across Ohio’s correctional system.
- Develop supervision staff training, policies, and practices that promote coaching and case management, and train staff in trauma-informed and person-centered responsive care that uses best practices to provide consistent but individualized treatment.
 - See [Iowa Department of Corrections Staff Competency Matrix](#): A structured framework outlining the knowledge, skills, and behaviors correctional staff must demonstrate to effectively support rehabilitation, reentry preparation, and person-centered practices across Iowa’s facilities.
- Train judges and court staff on key components of community supervision, such as the Risk-Needs-Responsivity model, case management, reentry planning, and behavior change tools to improve sentencing outcomes and responses to technical violations.
- Track access to and participation in correctional and reentry-related programs, apprenticeships, employment, and resources and adjust approaches as necessary to ensure fairness.
 - See [Pennsylvania Department of Corrections Dashboards](#): Interactive dashboards tracking reentry metrics, program performance, and population outcomes to promote transparency, inform decision-making, and drive continuous improvement within Pennsylvania’s correctional system.

B. Use a human-centered approach to set goals and coordinate across systems.

- Provide every person leaving prison or on supervision with a state identification card, Social Security card, and other vital documents. This can be accomplished by staff meeting with people prior to their release to apply for identification documents or providing opportunities for community-based agencies to assist people with the application processes before release through partnerships.
 - See [Alabama House Bill 2 \(2021\)](#): A law requiring that, before release, certain incarcerated people be provided with a birth certificate, Social Security card, and state-issued identification to ensure essential documentation is in place for reentry.
 - See [Florida Statute 944.605](#): A law requiring the Department of Corrections to arrange for a digitized photograph and provide notice of an incarcerated person’s anticipated release—including to the court, law enforcement, and, when appropriate, victims—and ensure the person is issued an identification card within 60 days before release.
 - See [Virginia DMV Connect](#) program: A mobile and onsite outreach initiative where DMV staff visit correctional facilities and reentry service sites to help justice-involved individuals obtain or restore driver’s licenses, state IDs, and vehicle registration before or shortly after release.

- Actively involve each person, starting at intake, in developing a personalized reentry plan that identifies their treatment, program, and service needs using assessment results to guide pre-release preparation and support a successful transition home.
 - See [Hawaii Department of Public Safety Comprehensive Reentry Plan](#): A statewide framework that begins reentry planning at intake, coordinates interagency services, and ensures continuity of care from prison to community.
- Provide transitional services that recognize and address the diverse needs of people returning home, including those who are aging or have learning, intellectual, or developmental disabilities. These services should offer tailored supports, such as accessible case management, health care coordination, and vocational or educational opportunities, to ensure all individuals can understand system requirements, gain meaningful skills, and successfully reintegrate without risk of reincarceration.
- Engage people with firsthand experience in the criminal justice system to provide case management, mentoring, and other reentry support, beginning during incarceration, intensifying during transition into the community, and continuing after release.
 - See [California Transitions Clinic](#): A network of community health clinics with integrated care teams including community health workers with lived experience of incarceration and dedicated to supporting people returning from prison with medical, behavioral health, and social services linkage.
- See [Hawaii Department of Health Forensic Peer Specialist Program](#): A training and internship program that integrates forensic peer specialists (people with lived experience of incarceration and behavioral health needs) into reentry support, helping bridge the gap between correctional settings and community-based recovery services.
- For people on community supervision, use the lightest approach possible and avoid reporting and programming requirements that impede social reintegration and employment. Provide structured programs that can lead to early termination of supervision for people assessed as having high needs and elevated risk of reoffending.
 - See [Georgia SB 105](#): A law that establishes a clear pathway for early termination of felony probation after three years (if certain conditions are met, like no revocations and paid restitution).
- Ensure that judges have a full picture of a person’s needs, their program participation, and available resources in the community to inform their responses to technical violations, such as alternatives to issuing warrants for missed court appointments. Reentry service providers should offer training on [collaborative comprehensive case plans](#) and Risk-Need-Responsivity to judges and other judicial leaders to further highlight the needs of people in reentry.
- Provide incentives for positive behavior on community supervision, including recognition and early termination of community supervision.
 - See [Revised Code of Washington 9.94A.717](#): Establishes procedural guidelines and obligations related to sentencing or supervision, ensuring clarity and consistency in how community custody and related conditions are applied under Washington’s Sentencing Reform Act.

Resources

- [Advancing Fairness and Transparency: National Guidelines for Post-Conviction Risk and Needs Assessment](#), CSG Justice Center
- [Changing Systems, Changing Behavior: Five Ways Corrections Agencies Can Work to Reduce Recidivism](#), CSG Justice Center
- [Collaborative Comprehensive Case Plans](#), CSG Justice Center
- [Improving Responses to People with Mental Illnesses: The Essential Elements of Specialized Probation Initiatives](#), CSG Justice Center
- [Practical Considerations Related to Release and Sentencing for Defendants Who Have Behavioral Health Needs: A Judicial Guide](#), CSG Justice Center
- [Staffing for Success: Establishing Core Competencies and Training Supports for Corrections and Community Supervision Staff](#), CSG Justice Center
- [State Identification: Reentry Strategies for State and Local Leaders](#), CSG Justice Center
- [A Ten-Step Guide to Transforming Probation Departments to Reduce Recidivism](#), CSG Justice Center
- [A better path forward for criminal justice: Prisoner reentry](#), The Brookings Institution
- [Providing Identification for Those Released from Incarceration](#), National Conference of State Legislatures
- [Transition from Jails to Community](#), The National Institute of Corrections

Principle 2: Access to Safe, Stable Housing

Housing is foundational to successful reentry.

Without a safe, stable place to live, people leaving incarceration face significant barriers to employment, health care, education, and supervision compliance—each of which heightens the risk of reincarceration. Yet access to housing remains one of the most persistent challenges in the reentry process.

This principle focuses on breaking down systemic silos; prioritizing housing for justice-involved people; and leveraging partnerships, data, and funding streams to increase access to evidence-based housing solutions. State leaders have a critical role to play in aligning housing and justice systems to build a fair infrastructure that supports successful transitions from incarceration to community life.

A. Collaborate to break down silos across systems.

- Build consensus around a shared target population and agree on specific housing interventions that match the target population's needs (such as [rapid rehousing](#), [permanent supportive housing](#), etc.).
 - The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC), in partnership with the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) and local housing providers, operates the [Returning Home Ohio \(RHO\) program](#) to support people with severe mental illness or chronic substance use disorders who are at risk of homelessness upon release from prison. Through rental subsidies, landlord mediation, and tailored supportive services, RHO connects people to permanent supportive housing, significantly reducing their likelihood of reincarceration and fostering stable community reentry.
- Prioritize available housing resources (for example, housing vouchers) for individuals exiting the justice system and engage and establish partnerships with local and regional housing providers such as [state housing finance agencies](#), [public housing authorities](#), [Continuums of Care](#), and local landlords.
 - Washington's Department of Corrections operates a [Housing Voucher Program](#) under its Reentry Division, providing rental assistance (e.g., up to \$700/month for 6 months) to individuals released from prison who do not have an approved release address. The payments go directly to housing providers, and the program was developed in partnership with transitional housing providers, local landlords, and housing authorities to prioritize returning people.

B. Assess people universally for homelessness risk.

- Use a universal housing assessment to collect data on history and risk of homelessness and establish referral pathways that connect people in need to the appropriate housing interventions. Housing partners such as [Continuums of Care](#) may be able to help establish a housing assessment and referral process and add assessment capacity in the form of in-reach.
 - See [Riverside County, CA](#): Assesses homelessness risk via point-in-time counts and coordinated housing navigation programs.
- Work with local housing providers to analyze housing placements for the reentry population by race and ethnicity and identify patterns that perpetuate systemic disadvantages.
 - See [City of Austin and Travis County, TX](#): Partners with housing providers and city leadership to analyze reentry housing placements by race and ethnicity, identify disparities, and target systemic barriers for justice-involved residents in Austin and Travis County.
- Use cross-system data to quantify the size of the population returning from incarceration that is at risk of experiencing homelessness at a state and/or local level to make the case for housing prioritization and investment.
 - See [Salt Lake County](#): Uses cross-system data—especially from point-in-time homelessness counts and coordinated homelessness dashboards—to estimate how many people returning from incarceration are at risk of homelessness at the local level, informing housing prioritization and investment strategies.

C. Connect people to evidence-based housing solutions fairly.

- To open opportunities for existing rental units, develop dedicated positions such as housing specialists/navigators or landlord liaisons to establish relationships with local housing providers and create reentry plans that make connections to permanent housing before and after release. These specialists may also educate public housing authorities and other housing providers on reducing or mitigating certain discretionary criminal background screening criteria.
- Reduce formal barriers to housing by engaging with housing providers and advocating for housing policy revisions (such as limiting unreasonable criminal record lookbacks and using voucher resources for people exiting the justice system). Additionally, advance fair-chance housing bills that ban or regulate questions about criminal history on housing applications.
 - See [Union County, PA](#): Collaborates with housing authorities and reentry partners to promote fair-chance housing policies and expand access for justice-involved residents.
 - See [New Jersey Fair Chance in Housing Act](#): Bars landlords from asking about criminal history on rental applications until after a conditional offer is made.
- Limit or minimize local ordinances (for example, “crime-free” or “zero tolerance” policies) or supervision conditions (for example, “do not be near other people with records”) that restrict or limit access to housing for people with records.
 - See [Illinois](#): Revised local ordinances and supervision rules to remove restrictive “crime-free” and exclusion zones, expanding housing access.
- Leverage or increase short-term financial resources to help people access existing housing. This includes providing landlord incentives, rental assistance through cash supports, and one-time costs (security deposits, utility arrears, etc.). Ensure diverse sources of cross-system funding are cataloged and that providers have the capacity to access them (such as billing Medicaid).
 - See [Washington Reentry Housing Assistance Program](#): Provides up to six months of direct housing support—paying landlords directly—to help people exiting prison access stable housing immediately.
 - See Washington’s [Landlord Damage Relief Program](#): Reimburses landlords for damages, lost rent, or upgrade costs (up to \$1,000–\$5,000) to encourage them to rent to tenants using housing subsidies.

D. Expand the available housing supply.

- Make the business case to invest in resources for this population by identifying costs and cataloging expected intervention savings. Identify a target audience for this business case and craft messaging specific to that audience.
 - See [Making the Case for Housing](#): Webinar that explores data on system cycling, cost analysis, and tools to build a local “business case” for housing investment.
- See [City of Salina, KS](#): Analyzes system costs and savings to build a compelling business case for housing investments benefiting justice-involved and high-need residents.
- Leverage the range of housing resources available, such as traditional housing funding (such as federal or state tax credits), HUD resources (such as HOME, CDBG, or American Rescue Plan), surplus land, or public housing authority resources.

- See [California HOME American Rescue Plan Program](#): Allocates over \$131 million to support affordable housing development, supportive services, and reentry housing pilots.
- Bring non-traditional housing funders to the table, such as departments of corrections or parole agencies, or leverage public-private partnerships with banks, health plans, or foundations, among others, to create more flexible funding mechanisms that invest in housing for the reentry population.
 - See [Georgia No Longer Bound](#): A faith-based residential recovery program in Georgia offering long-term addiction treatment, vocational training, and holistic support for men seeking transformation.
- See [Flexible Housing Subsidy Pools](#): A centralized, flexible funding mechanism that coordinates rental subsidies, landlord engagement, and supportive services aimed at housing vulnerable populations with fewer eligibility gaps and faster placements.
- Scale up successful pilots of housing interventions that draw on diverse sources of funding such as reinvesting public cost savings or dedicating new state housing funding streams.
 - See [Colorado State Housing Voucher Program](#): Scale housing pilots using reinvested savings and new state vouchers.

Resources

- [Action Points: Four Steps to Expand Access to Housing for People in the Justice System with Behavioral Health Needs](#), CSG Justice Center
- [Breaking Down Barriers: Lessons from Housing – Justice System Collaborations](#), CSG Justice Center
- [Building Connections to Housing During Reentry](#), CSG Justice Center
- [Explainer: Building Effective Partnerships with Continuums of Care to Increase Housing Options for People Leaving Prisons and Jails](#), CSG Justice Center
- [How States Are Engaging Private Landlords—An Untapped Resource in Reentry Housing](#), CSG Justice Center
- [Reducing Homelessness for People with Behavioral Health Needs Leaving Prisons and Jails: Recommendations to California’s Council on Criminal Justice and Behavioral Health](#), CSG Justice Center
- [Fair Chance Ordinances: An Advocate’s Toolkit](#), National Housing Law Project
- [Opening Doors to Housing Initiative](#), Vera Institute of Justice

Principle 3: Economic Mobility and Meaningful Employment

The pathway to lasting reintegration begins with economic opportunity.

Employment is one of the strongest predictors of successful reentry, yet people with criminal records face a complex web of legal, structural, and societal barriers that block access to meaningful, stable work. From occupational licensing restrictions to employer biases and overwhelming debt burdens, these barriers not only hinder individual progress but also undermine public safety and workforce development efforts.

This principle outlines strategies to expand access to employment, improve job readiness, engage employers in second-chance hiring, and reduce financial penalties that trap people in cycles of poverty and incarceration. When reentry and workforce development strategies are aligned—and laws, licensing boards, and employers support fair chance practices—states can unlock the potential of returning people and strengthen their communities and economies in the process.

A. Examine collateral consequences in licensing and hiring decisions.

- Review mandatory collateral consequences to determine where they can be removed or converted into discretionary ones, establishing a presumption in favor of hiring or licensing and ensuring robust procedural safeguards that give individuals with criminal records every opportunity to demonstrate their qualifications and job readiness.
 - See [Vermont Order of Limited Relief](#): Allows an individual to petition for an order of limited relief if granting the petition meets certain conditions including if it will help the individual obtain/maintain employment, education, housing, benefits, or occupational licensing.
 - See [AL SB 138](#): Encourages second-chance hiring by granting employers limited immunity from liability when hiring individuals with court-issued orders of relief.
- Limit how long consequences remain in effect, particularly mandatory ones.
 - See [California Business and Professions Code Section 480](#): Permits licensing boards to deny a license based on criminal history only if the crime occurred within the preceding 7 years.
- Review the offenses that trigger each collateral consequence to determine whether they have clear public safety implications in the context of the job at issue and eliminate the triggering offenses that do not.
 - See [Wisconsin Fair Employment Act](#): Requires a licensing agency to justify in writing the denial or revocation of a license based on a conviction.
- Require licensing boards or agencies to provide specific guidance for individualized consideration of applicants with convictions.
- Require licensing boards or agency decision-makers to apply a “direct relationship”² test and identify the significant public safety implications that could arise if a convicted person participates in the specific tasks, duties, and obligations of the job or licensed activity at issue.

² “Direct relationship” tests occur when decision-makers determine whether the circumstances of the underlying crime(s) are substantially similar to the responsibilities held by the license or job that the candidate has applied to perform.

- See [Michigan Compiled Laws § 338.42](#): Legislative policy outlining circumstances in which a licensing board may consider an individual’s criminal history, including if the offense “has a direct and specific relationship.”
- Develop policies that employers and licensing bodies can use to clearly explain how convictions are factored into decision-making in application materials and other resources.

B. Integrate reentry and workforce development strategies.

- Prepare people for employment success by teaching basic technology skills; crafting resumes; offering interview trainings and access to free interview-appropriate clothing; and assembling documentation of all certificates, degrees, and skills acquired prior to release.
 - See [Michigan’s Vocational Village](#): A Department of Corrections–led, campus-style training model that delivers industry-recognized credentials and hands-on workforce training inside prisons, aligning participants with in-demand occupations and connecting them to employment opportunities upon release.
- Create and adapt education, training, apprenticeship, work release, and employment programs that connect people with records to industries offering good, sustainable jobs—especially in sectors with worker shortages and few hiring barriers.
 - See [Milwaukee County Integrated Reentry and Employment Strategies Project Summary](#): Matches returning individuals to tailored job training and services based on assessments to improve employability and reduce recidivism.
- Ensure that people who are incarcerated earn equitable wages for employment while in prison.
 - See [Maine’s expanded work-release and fair-wage employment models](#): Maine’s Department of Corrections offers work-release programs that let eligible residents earn community wages for jobs in the community, with earnings used for room/board, fines, fees, personal expenses, and savings in preparation for reentry. Maine has also implemented remote work opportunities paying industry-standard wages to incarcerated workers with secure oversight and job training.

C. Engage employers in hiring people with criminal records.

- Identify employers willing to hire people with criminal records and engage them in educating other employers and addressing their concerns.
 - See [Second Chance Business Coalition \(National\)](#): Example of a cross-sector coalition comprising private employers committed to promoting second chance hiring within their companies; the website includes tools and resources to successfully implement hiring programs.
- Hold in-person and virtual job fairs in state correctional facilities where prospective employers can speak and share opportunities with people who are incarcerated.
 - See [Indiana Hoosier Initiative for Re-Entry](#): Collaborative, nationally recognized virtual job fair offered in five prisons, featuring several employers who delivered presentations highlighting available positions for hire.

D. Minimize debt accrual.

- Pause child support while parents are incarcerated to avoid the accrual of excessive debt that can be detrimental to successful reentry and impractical to collect. Child support debt averages \$20,000–\$36,000 for returning parents, which is much higher than average support debt of non-incarcerated low-income parents.³
 - See [Revised Code of Washington 26.09.320](#): Legislative policy that outlines abatement and reinstatement of child support based on incarceration.
- Eliminate court-imposed fees for supervision and programming, such as drug testing, treatment programs, and electronic monitoring.
 - See [Alameda County, California Ordinance](#): County ordinance that prohibits assessment of fees for probation services.
- Eliminate interest charges for people with legal financial obligations who are incarcerated.
 - See [Washington House Bill E2SHB 1783](#): Bill that outlaws accrual of interest on non-restitution legal financial obligations; also outlines conditions under which the court may waive or reduce interest on the restitution portion of legal financial obligations.
- End the practice of sending fines and fees debt to private collection agencies.

Resources

- [Fair Chance Licensing Project: States Expand Access to In-Demand Jobs](#), CSG Justice Center
- [Integrated Reentry and Employment Strategies: Reducing Recidivism and Promoting Job Readiness](#), CSG Justice Center
- [Reducing Structural Barriers to School and Work for People with Juvenile Records](#), CSG Justice Center
- [Removing Structural Barriers to Employment: A Playbook for Every State](#), CSG Justice Center
- [Self-Assessment for Employment-Focused Reentry Programs: Measuring Fidelity to the Integrated Reentry and Employment Strategies \(IRES\) Framework](#), CSG Justice Center
- [50 State Survey: Probation and Parole Fees](#), Fines & Fees Justice Center
- [Providing Another Chance: Resetting Recidivism Risk in Criminal Background Checks](#), RAND Corporation

³ Lynne Haney, “Child Support and Reentry,” National Institute of Justice, June 1, 2021, <https://nij.ojp.gov/library/publications/child-support-and-reentry>.

Principle 4: Pre- and Post-release Educational Opportunities

Education is one of the most transformative tools available to individuals during and after incarceration.

Access to quality educational opportunities has been shown to reduce recidivism, increase employability, and promote personal growth. Yet systemic barriers persist, from funding restrictions and admissions discrimination to institutional policies that limit access and retention for people with criminal records.

This principle focuses on expanding equitable access to education at all stages of the justice system.

A. Increase access to education.

- Lift statutory or administrative funding restrictions that prevent incarcerated students or people in the community with a criminal record from accessing career and technical education and postsecondary education.
 - See [New Jersey Senate Bill 2055](#): Permits incarcerated students to receive state financial aid.
- Develop a range of funding and scholarship opportunities for “nontraditional” students, including currently and formerly incarcerated people, at state higher education institutions.
 - See [Laying the Groundwork: How States Can Improve Access to Continued Education for People in the Criminal Justice System – In Practice: Funding in Wisconsin](#): Highlights Wisconsin’s wide range of funding sources to support postsecondary education for incarcerated students. Sources include federal Perkins IV and Second Chance Pell funding, state funding, state-funded grant programs, and an inclusive state financial aid system.
- Remove requirements to disclose current or past involvement with the criminal justice system during the application process for state-funded community colleges or universities.
 - See [California Senate Bill 118](#): Prohibits a postsecondary educational institution from inquiring about a prospective student’s criminal record on an initial application form or at any time during the admissions process before a final admissions decision.
- Limit barriers to participation and retention for people with a criminal record in state institutions of higher education, including restrictions related to on-campus employment or housing, and provide support such as mentoring and counseling.
 - See [Rhode Island Transcending Through Education Foundation \(TTEF\)](#): A 501c3 nonprofit, founded by people with lived experience, that provides scholarships and mentorship and partners with the Department of Corrections and local community colleges to offer courses in prison.

It highlights strategies to remove statutory and administrative barriers, align education and workforce development systems, and incentivize participation and completion. When supported by strong cross-agency collaboration and a commitment to quality programming, education becomes a powerful driver of reentry success and long-term economic mobility.

- Help students who have defaulted on student loans return to good standing and make them Pell Grant eligible.

B. Improve educational opportunities.

- Offer high-quality career and technical education as well as associate- and bachelor-level programming for incarcerated people in all state correctional facilities.
 - See [Colorado Department of Corrections Prison Programs Unit](#): Series of evidence-based programs and services encompassing a number of areas such as postsecondary education, career and technical education, peer advocacy, faith-based support, and more.
- Ensure that postsecondary programs and professional certificates offered in prisons lead to industry-recognized credentials.
 - See [California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation Penal Code](#): Policy that explicitly outlines goals and considerations for career and technical education programs, including whether a program provides industry-recognized credentials.

- See [Fresh Start Program \(National\)](#): A temporary federal program by the U.S. Department of Education designed to help students get out of defaulted federal student loans and restore access to aid.

- See [California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation CTE Programs](#): A link to CDCR's expansive CTE programs, with 20 programs that provide industry-recognized certification.

- Ensure that the state correctional agency's career and technical education and credentialing offerings are based on labor market needs; selected with an understanding of state occupational licensing barriers for people with a criminal record; and developed in consultation with employers, the state workforce development agency, chambers of commerce, and other key stakeholders.

- See [New Jersey Vocational Training Pilot Program & Vocational Training Planning Board](#): Collaborative effort focused on improving vocational programming, consisting of the commissioners of corrections, labor and workforce development, and education, as well as members from the NJ Business and Industry Association, NJ Council of County Vocational-Technical Schools, and more.

C. Provide incentives to participate in and complete educational programs.

- Allow the parole-granting agency to consider postsecondary education progress when making decisions about early release after people in prison complete their mandatory sentence or when determining sentencing reductions.
 - See [New York Correction Law § 803-B](#): Provides limited credit time allowances for incarcerated individuals serving indeterminate or determinate sentences imposed for specific offenses; provides good behavior allowances against definite sentences.

- See [North Carolina Department of Public Safety Prisons Sentence Credits](#): A thorough breakdown of allowable earned time credit by offense type.

- Develop a parole-granting agency policy that allows participation in postsecondary education in lieu of parole conditions related to required employment.

- See [Indiana State Probation Office Conditions of Supervision](#): Allows a person on parole, with approval from their supervising officer, to attend school or vocational training instead of maintaining employment.
- Ensure that state correctional agencies and community colleges have articulation agreements that recognize the equivalency of in-facility credits and credentials, enabling seamless transfer to community degree programs.

Resources

- [Laying the Groundwork: How States Can Improve Access to Continued Education for People in the Criminal Justice System](#), CSG Justice Center
- [Reducing Structural Barriers to School and Work for People with Juvenile Records](#), CSG Justice Center
- [Equity and Excellence in Practice: A Guide for Higher Education in Prison](#), Alliance for Higher Education in Prison
- [Reentry Education Framework](#) and [Reentry Education Toolkit](#), U.S. Department of Education
- [Unlocking Potential: Pathways from Prison to Postsecondary Education](#), Vera Institute of Justice

Principle 5: Comprehensive Health and Behavioral Health Treatment and Care

People with serious mental illnesses, substance use disorders, and histories of homelessness are often caught at the intersection of behavioral health and the justice system without access to the care, stability, or coordination they need.

Improving outcomes for this population requires more than programmatic solutions; it demands sustained, formalized collaboration across state and local systems. When behavioral health, criminal justice, housing, and health care agencies align their efforts, they can better identify individuals' needs early, divert people from incarceration, and ensure continuity of care during and after custody.

This section outlines strategies to build infrastructure for effective cross-system partnerships, enhance data sharing and coordination, expand diversion pathways, and strengthen connections to care. Together, these efforts reduce repeated system contact, improve health and safety outcomes, and promote long-term stability for people with complex needs.

A. Strengthen and formalize cross-system collaboration.

- Formalize collaboration between housing, criminal justice, and behavioral health agencies at the state and local levels to improve housing outcomes for people in local criminal justice systems who have serious mental illnesses or substance use disorders, especially those with repeated system contact.
 - See [Pima County Housing First Initiative](#): A pay-for-success reentry housing program that offers transitional and permanent supportive housing paired with case management, health care, and justice-system navigation to reduce recidivism and homelessness.
- Increase availability of and connections to permanent supportive housing for people with serious mental illnesses or substance use disorders who have repeated contact with the justice system.

B. Improve local capacity to collect and share data.

- Facilitate cross-agency information sharing by providing plain language guidance on what information can and can't be shared—and with whom—and ensuring consistency with federal and state privacy protections.
- Implement universal mental health, substance use, and homelessness screenings at booking with timely follow-up clinical assessment, as needed, to identify people who are experiencing homelessness or have serious mental illnesses or substance use disorders.
 - See [The Challenge of Identifying, Diverting, and Treating Justice-Involved People with Mental Illnesses](#): A review of practices and documents on how screening for mental illness is conducted and data is exchanged across systems; highlights gaps between identified cases and assessments.

C. Increase local diversion as early as possible.

- Support, expand, and improve programs and policies to refer people experiencing symptoms of mental illness or substance use disorders to treatment and stabilization before they are arrested and booked. This includes supporting and broadening law enforcement treatment initiative programs across the state and clarifying the law of arrest and citation to encourage the use of diversion in appropriate circumstances.
- Encourage mental health, drug, and behavioral health courts to adhere to a standard set of best practices by (1) establishing accreditation criteria and (2) giving funding preference to accredited courts.
 - See [The Supreme Court of Ohio Specialized Docket Certification](#): Ohio requires mental health, drug, and behavioral health courts to follow a uniform set of best practices and prioritizes state funding for courts that achieve Specialized Docket Certification.
 - See [Georgia Accountability Courts](#): State-backed problem-solving dockets that combine judicial supervision, treatment, and support services as alternatives to incarceration for nonviolent people with substance use or mental health challenges.

D. Build connections to community care and services.

- Leverage Medicaid to recoup federal matching funds to improve access to health and behavioral health services across the continuum of care, which can be done by applying for Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services waivers to provide pre-release coverage to people who are incarcerated.
- Suspend, rather than terminate, Medicaid enrollment upon a person's incarceration and establish an automated process to facilitate reinstatement of Medicaid enrollment when the person is released.
 - See [Connecticut Medicaid for Formerly Incarcerated Individuals](#): Connecticut is pursuing a Medicaid Section 1115 "Justice-Involved Reentry" demonstration waiver to allow Medicaid coverage (including behavioral health and medication services) for eligible individuals up to 90 days prior to release and improve care transitions to the community.
- Improve community-based responses to people in crisis (e.g., allocate resources to crisis stabilization units, community responder teams, and mobile crisis and provide crisis intervention team training) and promote coordination of crisis and reentry systems.
 - See [Maine Department of Corrections Recovery Coach Program](#): Trains incarcerated individuals in peer recovery roles to support others' substance use recovery and bridge the transition to community reentry.
- Strengthen the continuity of care for people with complex needs through methods such as the health home model, which integrates delivery of health services, including primary care, mental health care, substance use treatment, and chronic disease management.
 - See [Texas Law Enforcement Telecommunication](#): Runs continuity of care queries, enabling correctional and behavioral health agencies to check whether a person has a history of public mental health contacts at booking.
- Train reentry staff and providers to identify a history of trauma and co-occurring conditions and then provide the appropriate treatment and accommodations.
- Increase remote access to care such as telehealth as a supplement to on-site staff.
- Employ community recovery centers and recovery coaches to engage people exiting correctional facilities or being diverted from incarceration.
 - See [Maine Department of Corrections Recovery Coach Program](#): Trains incarcerated individuals in peer recovery roles to support others' substance use recovery and bridge the transition to community reentry.

Resources

- [Building Capacity to Advance Local System Change for People with Behavioral Health Needs: A Snapshot of State-Led Solutions](#), CSG Justice Center
- [Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics Can Address Mental Health and Substance Use Needs Across the Criminal Justice System Intercepts](#), CSG Justice Center
- [Choosing the Right Data Strategy for Behavioral Health and Criminal Justice Initiatives](#), CSG Justice Center
- [A Matter of Public Health and Safety: How States Can Support Local Crisis Systems](#), CSG Justice Center
- [Medicaid Basics for Correctional Leaders and Agencies](#), CSG Justice Center and Center for Health Care Strategies
- [Stepping Up Pennsylvania: Findings and Recommendations from the Behavioral Health-Criminal Justice State Policy Scan Project](#), CSG Justice Center
- [Telehealth and Telecommunication Opportunities in the Criminal Justice System](#), CSG Justice Center
- [Trauma-Informed Approaches Across the Sequential Intercept Model](#), CSG Justice Center
- [States Reporting Corrections-Related Medicaid Enrollment Policies in Place for Prisons or Jails](#), Kaiser Family Foundation
- [Traumatic Brain Injury in Prisons and Jails: An Unrecognized Problem](#), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Principle 6: Strong Families and Social Networks

Families are often the most enduring source of support for people impacted by the justice system, but incarceration can place enormous emotional, logistical, and financial strain on those relationships.

Research consistently shows that maintaining strong family and social connections during incarceration improves post-release outcomes, reduces recidivism, and promotes intergenerational stability.⁴ Yet systemic barriers—such as high communication costs, restrictive visitation policies, and lack of coordination

across public systems—often make it difficult for families to stay connected.

This principle outlines actionable approaches to strengthen family ties during and after incarceration by reducing burdens on caregivers and children, expanding access to parenting supports and visiting,

⁴ Grant Duwe and Valerie Clark, “Blessed Be the Social Tie That Binds: The Effects of Prison Visitation on Offender Recidivism,” *Criminal Justice Policy Review* 24, no. 3 (2013): 271–296, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0887403411429724>; C. F. Hairston, “Family Ties During Imprisonment: Important to Whom and for What?” *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 18, no. 1 (1991): 87–104, <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/family-ties-during-imprisonment-important-whom-and-what>.

and training correctional staff to foster a more family-centered environment. By treating family and social bonds as essential—not optional—elements of reentry,

states can create policies that support the long-term success and well-being of people returning home and the families who stand beside them.

A. Build family and social connections.

- Mitigate the financial and emotional burden of incarceration for children and families of people in correctional facilities by offering free and accessible transportation, lodging services for visits, and other practical supports that will make it easier for them to maintain relationships with family members who are incarcerated.
 - See [Washington State Department of Corrections Lodging and Transportation Assistance Program](#): A transportation and/or hotel reimbursement program where qualifying applicants can receive up to two \$50 reimbursements.
- Offer individually responsive pre-release programming for parents.
 - See the [Oregon Parenting Inside Out \(PIO\)](#) program: Offered by The Pathfinder Network; focuses on equipping incarcerated parents with effective parenting skills. Content can often be adapted for pre-release purposes.
- Ensure that jail and prison policies support the preservation of family bonds with measures for providing child-friendly visiting spaces, allowing extended family visits and structured pre-release family activities, and offering virtual reading and homework activities.
 - See [Virginia Department of Corrections: Promoting Family Reintegration in Intensive Reentry Programs](#): Strengthens family ties through intensive reentry initiatives by offering parenting curricula, peer support, child-friendly visitation, and nursery programs to promote healthy reintegration.
- See [Washington Department of Corrections Parent/Teacher Conferences](#): Offers parent/teacher conferences via teleconference so incarcerated parents can engage with their children’s teachers and support academic progress.
- Train correctional officers on the experience of parental incarceration and trauma to better equip them to work with parents and families and supervise visits.
- Remove or reduce the cost of phone calls for people who are incarcerated.
 - See [California’s Keep Families Connected Act](#): Eliminated the cost of phone calls for people incarcerated in state prisons and local jails, allowing them to maintain important connections with their families without financial strain.
- Establish or expand virtual visiting options, including video visits, while also maintaining in-person visits.
 - See [Strengthening and Maintaining Family Connections: Best Practices for Child-Friendly Visiting—Pennsylvania Department of Corrections](#): Implemented child-friendly visiting and family engagement practices, like family days, parenting education, and video visits to strengthen connections between incarcerated parents and their children.
 - See [Virginia Caregiver Guide](#): Offers resources and support to families and caregivers of children with incarcerated parents, helping them navigate challenges and maintain connections.

- Establish an advisory committee to facilitate collaboration between corrections, child welfare, and human services agencies and develop an interagency plan to provide necessary services and support for children of incarcerated parents.
 - See [Minnesota Department of Health Leads Cross-County Collaboration to Support Families Impacted by Incarceration](#): A cross-county collaboration to support families impacted by incarceration—coordinating jails, health agencies, and community partners to expand parenting programs and strengthen family connections.
- Establish criteria for families to define what family is. Family is not always defined by a blood relation and often, people who are not relatives play a parental role.

Resources

- [Children of Incarcerated Parents: An Action Plan for Federal Policymakers](#), CSG Justice Center
- [Face to Face: Supporting Families of People in Prisons and Jails](#), CSG Justice Center
- [Statewide Correctional Initiatives Supporting Children with Incarcerated Parents: An Action Plan for Policymakers](#), CSG Justice Center and The National Resource Center on Children & Families of the Incarcerated
- [Strengthening and Maintaining Family Connections: Best Practices for Child-Friendly Video Visiting](#), CSG Justice Center
- [Children of Incarcerated Parents: A Bill of Rights](#), San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership
- [The Importance of Supporting Family Connections to Ensure Successful Reentry](#), R Street Institute

Principle 7: Access to Relief Mechanisms to Mitigate Barriers

A criminal record—even for a minor or long-past offense—can create lasting barriers to employment, housing, education, and community reintegration.

Relief mechanisms like sealing, expungement, and certificates of relief offer individuals the opportunity to move forward without the weight of a past conviction

continuing to limit their potential. However, access to these tools is often narrow, procedurally complex, or prohibitively expensive.

This section highlights policy strategies that states can use to broaden and strengthen their record clearance systems by automating relief where possible, expanding eligibility criteria, reducing procedural

hurdles, and ensuring legal clarity around the effects of granted relief. Together, these steps can transform record relief from a legal possibility into a meaningful and accessible second chance.

A. Expand relief pathways to remove barriers.

- Create or expand long-term relief mechanisms, such as automatic sealing and expungement.
 - See [Colorado Senate Bill 22-099 Sealing Criminal Records](#): Automates sealing of eligible nonviolent offenses, mandates that sealed records be excluded from consumer reports, and expands access to justice relief.
- Expand eligibility relief mechanisms by reducing waiting periods, expanding the list of eligible offenses, and revising limitations based on multiple convictions.
- Create or expand effective near-term relief mechanisms, such as certificates of relief, which are judicial orders that convert specified mandatory consequences into discretionary consequences for individuals who have been granted them.
 - See [Ohio Revised Code §2953.25 Certificate of Qualification for Employment for Persons Subject to Collateral Sanctions](#): Enables individuals to petition courts to lift certain employment and licensing barriers, creates a rebuttable presumption of fitness, and offers limited liability protection to employers, provided they are aware of it.
- Limit barriers to access non-automatic relief, such as filing fees, complex petition processes, extensive documentation and hearing requirements, and a lack of knowledge about the availability and effect of relief.
- Ensure that statutes authorizing relief mechanisms are clear about their effects on collateral consequences, explicitly stating that (1) neither mandatory nor discretionary consequences may be imposed based on an offense for which relief has been granted, (2) decision-makers may not inquire about cleared convictions, and (3) people who are granted clearance can freely deny the existence of those convictions if asked about them.

Resources

- [Removing Structural Barriers to Employment: A Playbook for Every State](#), CSG Justice Center
- [50-State Comparison: Expungement, Sealing & Other Record Relief](#), Collateral Consequences Resource Center
- [Advocate's Guide to Automatic Record Clearance](#), Code for America