

MODEL LETTER TO CONGRESS

June 12, 2005

Karen Sawall
Office of Senator John Cornyn
5005 Lyndon B Johnson Freeway
Dallas, TX 75244

Dear Karen,

It was a pleasure talking with you the other day when you returned my phone call. As you requested, I am putting in writing what we discussed on the phone in attempting to get Senator John Cornyn's support for the Second Chance Act.

As you probably know, we have a reentry crisis in this country with respect to offenders returning to their communities after being incarcerated in prisons. An important first step towards addressing this reentry crisis was taken when a bi-partisan group of Members of Congress introduced the Second Chance Act in both the House (H.R. 1704) and the Senate (S. 1934). The Second Chance Act will reduce recidivism, increase public safety, and help states and communities better address the large numbers of people returning to communities from prisons and jails. The bill focuses on four key areas: jobs, housing, mental health and substance abuse treatment, and strengthening families.

Stopping Recidivism: The Case for Action

- Nearly 700,000 people are released from prison to communities nationwide each year, and even more come back from county jails.
- Today, an estimated two-thirds of men and women leaving prison will be re-arrested for a felony or serious misdemeanor within three years of release.
- Such high recidivism rates translate into thousands of new crimes each year, at least half of which can be averted through improved prisoner reentry efforts.

Treating Substance Abuse and Mental Health Problems:

- Most people (70-80%) coming home from prison or jail have histories of drug or alcohol dependence.
- It is estimated that as many as 84% were under the influence of drugs/alcohol at the time of the offense.
- An increasing number of offenders have mental health problems and without treatment, relapse is likely.

Saving Taxpayer Dollars:

- Significant portions of state and local government budgets are now invested in the criminal justice system.
- Incarceration costs, on average, \$22,650 a year per person, with some states spending as much as \$44,000.
- According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, expenditures on corrections alone increased from \$9 billion in 1982 to \$44 billion in 1997.
- The Washington State Institute for Public Policy found that, “the best [reentry] programs can be expected to deliver 20% to 30% reductions in recidivism or crime rates” and that “programs that can deliver – at a reasonable program cost – even modest reductions in future criminality can have an attractive economic bottom line.”

Strengthening Families and Communities:

- One of the most significant costs of failed reentry and cycling people in and out of prison is the harmful impact on children and communities.
- In 1991, 900,000 children had at least one incarcerated parent; today there are two million kids with at least one incarcerated parent (an increase of more than 100%) and 10 million who have had a parent imprisoned.

It seems that in July 2006, the American people now appreciate the important aspects of the Second Chance Act. A recent poll by Zogby International, commissioned by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD), shows that 79% of Americans support passage of this important legislation. In addition, the poll also showed support for job training, drug treatment, mental health services, family support, mentoring and housing services after being incarcerated. Each of these areas, as you are aware, mirrors the goals of community corrections centers. A copy of the poll is attached for your perusal. If you as a member of the senator’s staff have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. I urge Senator Cornyn’s support the Second Chance Act and would be willing to discuss this Senate Bill (S. 1934) in greater detail.

Sincerely,

Den Freaney

Den Freaney
 Vice President of Development
 Dismas Charities, Inc.