

# Effective reentry partnerships between corrections and community.

Using new federal justice department funds to strengthen community-serving programs' role in the reentry process.



**NYU**

Marron Institute  
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**CRIME SURVIVORS FOR  
SAFETY AND JUSTICE**

## New correctional reentry challenges emerge in the response to COVID-19.

Prior to COVID-19, corrections leaders had been working with public safety stakeholders to address the national reentry challenge. About 630,000 people sentenced to prison for crimes are released every year, and about 6.7 million people arrested for crimes are released from jail.<sup>1</sup> This means that, on any given day, 20,000 people are released from custody. To ensure the safety and stability of those released, corrections works with community-serving programs to provide key linkages to stable housing, jobs, and treatment. These programs are cost-effective ways to promote public safety and prevent future crimes and are key parts of the reentry service continuum.<sup>2</sup>

Since the pandemic began, America's reentry and safety challenges have only increased. In addition to regularly scheduled releases, correctional systems are releasing people from prison or jail to lower their population density and keep everyone touched by the system safe. Local governments have reduced the average daily jail populations by as much as 50 percent,<sup>3</sup> and there have been notable large-scale releases from prisons in Oklahoma, Kentucky, and Illinois. In California alone, the number of people who were released from prison from January through April this year increased by 50 percent compared to the same period a year ago.<sup>4</sup>

People being released from prisons and jails are returning to communities in which supportive services are shut down or overburdened. Recent surveys by the Alliance for Safety and Justice and the Council of State Governments have shown:

**4 in 5**

**Reentry and crime-survivor service providers report an increasing need for services and diminished ability to provide them,** with four in five organizations reporting a change in service requests, resulting from both increased needs and an inability to reach or provide services to clients directly. The vast majority of respondents reported a severe drop in funding.<sup>5</sup>

**75%**

**Seventy-five percent of respondents to one survey said they had stopped providing some services or closed operations entirely** since the rise of the pandemic. Nearly one in five reentry service providers surveyed reported layoffs.<sup>6</sup>

Many people returning to the community from prisons and jails will face challenges such as accessing benefits and services, including medical care; access to technology and Wi-fi to connect to services virtually; and safe housing. The corrections services continuum needs to effectively manage these rapid releases to ensure that people return to their communities with the tools they need to be safe and avoid new crimes, and to know if they are carrying the coronavirus to avoid new outbreaks.

Correctional agencies and their partners in the community can provide vital support to help curtail the spread of the coronavirus by safely reducing the incarcerated population with appropriate support. They can also maintain system legitimacy by supporting crime victims and addressing the harm done by crimes.

But as governments face new fiscal constraints, resources will need to be reallocated to support the most effective ways of addressing these new public safety and public health challenges. To that end, this brief from the Alliance for Safety and Justice and the Litmus program at the Marron Institute of Urban Management at New York University summarizes key information about a new federal funding stream that could strengthen the reentry and crime-survivors services continuum that corrections depends on.

This brief:

1. Summarizes how new U.S. Justice Department funds are available, and can be used to address new reentry challenges and address the needs of crime victims;
2. Highlights how strengthening partnerships with community-serving programs can help address new correctional challenges; and
3. Details what steps corrections leaders can take to ensure that federal dollars for reentry are used effectively through local and state public safety planning processes.

## New federal dollars through the Justice Department are available to respond to the new reentry challenges at the state and local level.

One of the federal government aid packages includes an \$850 million appropriation to the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) for the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) program, through Coronavirus Emergency Supplemental Funding (CESF).

While this process uses the JAG formula to get money into the field, the CESF does not borrow from the designated areas associated with JAG.

These Justice Department funds were made available to support a broad range of activities to fulfill the mandate of helping states and local jurisdictions “prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus” that broadly fit the goal of sustaining the reentry and victims’ services continuum. The Justice Department notes that the program has “*no specific prohibitions . . . other than the unallowable costs that are identified in the Department of Justice Grants Financial Guide,*” and may not be used to support normal operations funded by state or local governments. A portion of the funds are designated for state purposes and a portion for local projects. Applicants will have two years to spend these funds (and may request one-year extensions at some point).

States will apply and give notice that they intend to use these funds through their designated State Administering Agency (generally, an office under the Governor, or certain correctional or public safety agency).

As state government budgetary constraints begin to take hold, correctional agencies and their partners in the community can provide vital support to curtail the spread of the coronavirus in the community and respond to the impacts of this pandemic by safely reducing the incarcerated population with appropriate support. These funds can make that possible.



## How can federal funds be used to help support safe and effective releases and reentry?

In light of COVID-19, corrections leaders need to think about a broad set of issues some people leaving a prison or jail may face returning to the community and creative ways federal funds can be used to address these issues.



Key reentry needs these federal funds can pay for include:

**Health care and access to medicine.** *Items to address someone's medical needs without having to enter a clinic or emergency room can be purchased with these funds.* These could include a 30-day (or more) supply of all medications, access to specialized drugs that help manage an overdose (like naloxone or other drugs), medical devices, and telehealth equipment to connect with medical professionals and maintain social-distancing protocols.

**Housing.** *Temporary rooms for quarantine, longer-term options for people who experience homelessness, and short-to-long-term housing options for those who lack approved or safe return addresses can be paid for with these funds.*

**Technology and equipment.** Technology and access to Wi-Fi or 3G is crucial to accessing services, maintaining social distancing, and supervising people who need case management services or require additional monitoring. *Equipment for people returning to the community, probation or parole staff, case managers, and service providers can be purchased with these funds.* This includes smartphones, tablets, and computers to access benefits and telehealth services. These funds can be used for technology to supervise high-risk persons and monitor their location and compliance with release conditions.

**Basic tools, supplies, and supports.** Community public health and public safety interests are best served if people returning to the community from prisons and jails are provided with basic supplies to lessen their contact with others and reduce the strain on food banks and other community-based organizations. *To this end, funds can also be used to provide food for several weeks, reducing contact with food banks. Additionally, funds can be used to purchase toiletries, masks, hand sanitizer, soap, and disinfectants, to adhere to public health standards.*

**Training for everyone involved in reentry.** *Programming and training for staff and people returning to the community from prisons and jails can be purchased to meet immediate and longer-term needs resulting from or exacerbated by this crisis.* This could include training on how to use online resources or applications, how to safely perform work duties, or how to deal with client needs. Likewise, *this could include programming that is normally available in-person, such as cognitive-behavioral skill building, or programs specific to COVID-19, such as teaching parents to manage their children's distance-learning.*

## How can Justice Department dollars be used to support crime victims?

In order for a reentry process to be seen as legitimate by all stakeholders, the justice system must respond to the needs of crime victims, either on its own, or in collaboration with others.

Even prior to COVID-19, the justice system faced challenges meeting victims' needs, with only about one in nine victims of a violent crime reporting receiving any services from a victim-services agency<sup>7</sup>, and two out of three victims reporting they received no help following the incident.<sup>8</sup>

Since the start of the pandemic, surveys of organizations whose missions, in whole or in part, are to serve crime victims have reported an increased demand for family violence services; worrisome accounts that sheltering in place and limits on mobility will inflame family violence have been reported in the media.<sup>9</sup> Surveys of crime victims organizations conducted by the National Centers for Victims of Crime and Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice:

- **Echoed the concerns of reentry organizations** around whether they have the financial tools available to adapt their workforce and clients to technology to provide services virtually;<sup>10</sup> and
- **Reported management, administrative, and operational challenges around securing and maintaining additional funding.** Organizations report lacking personal protective equipment, reducing the services they provide, or lacking the ability to provide direct services remotely. Groups that serve victims of human trafficking report facing the biggest challenges.<sup>11</sup>

*Justice Department dollars can also be used to serve crime victims, using similar services and approaches to those outlined above for reentry. This money can be used to pay for rooms for people in need of safe housing, for adoption of technologies to provide telemedicine services to victims, for personal protective equipment, and for infrastructure changes, like plexiglass in reception areas to ensure someone's health and safety. And as crime victims organizations develop new strategies to serve clients, these federal funds can be used to help such groups prepare for new unanticipated complex needs, like the evolving health standard guidelines that are likely to be introduced.*

## Federal funds can strengthen partnerships with community-serving programs to solve correctional challenges.

Most correctional leaders are taking extraordinary measures to keep people in their custody and their staff safe, but these measures are unlikely to be enough without a reduction in the population in their facilities. Correctional agencies are experiencing staff shortages due to illness and quarantine. The economic impact of the pandemic will likely require deep budget cuts.

Using these Justice Department dollars to revise, revamp, and renew relationships with community-serving programs to address gaps in the reentry continuum is a core strategy corrections leaders can use to navigate new challenges.

For many, if not most, the easiest way to administer reentry and crime-victim resources will be through partnerships with community-serving programs.



Key benefits of these partnerships include:

- 1. An infrastructure that links community-serving programs to corrections already exists.** Often agencies have an existing network of programs in their vendor systems that already administer services to incarcerated or released persons, and the courts, human services, or law enforcement often partner with these programs to deliver services to victims.
- 2. Community-serving programs can move faster than the government.** Under emergency authority, the normally burdensome government-contracting process is much more flexible, allowing for the quick expansion of existing vendor-service networks or the creation of new ones.
- 3. Community-serving programs are more closely located and know more local resources for clients.** These vital parts of the reentry continuum are often located more directly in the communities people will be returning to and are frequently staffed by people who know the neighborhood resources available at the block level.

## What steps can corrections leaders take to ensure that federal dollars for reentry are used effectively?

To ensure that funds from the *U.S. Department of Justice* are used to strengthen the reentry continuum and that the funds are used creatively to solve public health and public safety challenges, corrections leaders should take the following steps:

**Include community-serving programs in state plans to be submitted to the federal government.** Corrections leaders should be in touch with the State Administering Agency (SAA) that is responsible for formulating plans and submitting to the Justice Department and let them know how they want these funds to be spent. When corrections leaders communicate with their SAA, they should note an interest to add to the plan, an intention to use federal dollars to support programs as part of state response to COVID-19, and creative ways to use these funds that meet the corrections system's needs.

**Engage law enforcement in a discussion of reentry continuum needs.** Prosecutors, police, sheriffs, and the courts need to know what corrections leaders are doing and who they should be partnering with to navigate the new reentry challenges. Directors of state and local corrections systems need to be in direct communication with law enforcement leaders around their need to partner with community-serving programs to best manage the needs of the entire public safety system. Law enforcement agencies that are responsible for delivering services to crime victims should be encouraged to directly contract with programs to effectively meet their needs. With the right information on corrections needs, law enforcement stakeholders could be champions for effective use of these funds.





**Engage community-serving programs directly in planning for how these funds can be used.** The CBO component of the reentry community can be called upon to help develop more creative and effective policies to ensure the safety and stability of people leaving prisons and jails and can serve as thought partners to corrections leaders in developing service solutions for crime victims. Working together with these partners, corrections may be able to do everything from purchasing vacant dormitories for the reentry population or victims who need safe housing to developing reentry kits that fit the current public health and safety needs of the community.

## About the organizations



Alliance for Safety and Justice (ASJ) is a national organization that aims to win new safety priorities in states across the country, and brings together diverse crime survivors to advance policies that help communities most harmed by crime and violence.



Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice is a national network of crime survivors joining together to create healing communities and shape public policy. CSSJ is a flagship project of the Alliance for Safety and Justice



The Litmus program at NYU's Marron Institute of Urban Management is dedicated to innovation and progress in the public sector.

## For more information

[Recommendations for Rapid Release and Reentry During the COVID-19 Pandemic.](#)

## Endnotes

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