



2nd Annual CT Reentry Reform Day at the State Capitol Building.

On Wednesday, April 3rd, stakeholders and concerned citizens congregated for Connecticut's annual Reentry Reform Day at the state Capitol. The day's activities focused upon a goal both remarkably simple and incredibly complex: the creation of a system of criminal justice and community reentry that reflects the dignity and humanity of the individual, and that positions individuals exiting incarceration to thrive in their communities.

Attended by well over one hundred supporters, Reform Day was an important step in advancing substantive community reentry reform in the state. Bringing together individuals with lived criminal justice experience, community advocates, and representatives of state and local government, the day's events represented a bridge, into a new gubernatorial administration and into a new phase of collaboration around reentry.

The day's events began with a viewing of CBS's 60 Minutes presentation on Connecticut Prison Reform and Cheshire Correctional's TRUE Unit. Discussion regarding the segment was led by former Warden, and now District Administrator, Scott Erfe, who reflected on the success of the modified German model in Connecticut and importance of creating prison environments and programs that respect the dignity and embrace the humanity of the incarcerated. How we treat citizens during their incarceration directly impacts how they adapt to the community. When incarceration is merely punitive, the consequences are born by the whole of the community. When incarceration provides avenues for redemption, the benefits are equally shared.



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The morning's next panel allowed Governor Lamont's transition team to update stakeholders on the administration's progress in advancing reentry reform efforts within state agencies, and on the progress of reentry-related bills in the legislature. Emphasis was placed on closing health care coverage gaps, connecting incarcerated individuals with educational opportunities, creating community partnerships with businesses to create employment opportunities, and on Clean Slate legislation, which would benefit thousands of Connecticut citizens with criminal records, facilitating access to employment and housing.

The afternoon saw state and local officials present their visions for progress in reentry policy. Moderator Steven Hernandez expounded upon the Committee on Equity and Opportunity's Hope for Success: Returning Home report, and the necessary steps to make Connecticut a "true second chance state". Hartford Mayor Luke Bronin reported on the initial success of Hartford's Reentry Welcome Center, and discussed gaps and barriers identified by the Welcome Center's experience to date. State Representative Brandon McGee honored the efforts of long-standing reentry advocates such as former State Representative Bill Dyson and praised reentry roundtables' front-line efforts in that lineage. Salman Kazerounian, Staff Attorney with the Connecticut Fair Housing Center, identified the specific challenges and injustices present in the area of reentry housing, and Eric Christmas, Director of the Mayor's Initiative for Reentry Affairs, reported on the Initiative's efforts in Bridgeport, and underscored the importance of collaboration between government and community. Corrections Commissioner Rollin Cook affirmed his commitment to beginning the reentry process from the very moment that incarceration begins.



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The day's final panel was perhaps the most poignant. Daryl McGraw moderated a frank discussion with impacted individuals regarding their lived experience upon return to their communities. All panelists reiterated the importance of not only welcoming and supporting incarcerated individuals upon their return, but also enlisting their voices in the discussion and permitting them the place at the table that their unique experience and perspective merits. Impacted individuals best understand the challenges directly faced by the newly released, and they represent an indispensable asset to Connecticut's reform efforts.

Reentry Reform Day was a success, an opportunity to reflect on the progress of the last year and a chance to unite in redoubled efforts to progress yet farther. It also served as a reminder of the many and complex challenges still faced in the reentry arena. But for every problem, there is a solution. We extend our thanks to everyone who participated in the day's events for choosing to be a part of that solution, that by Reentry Reform Day 2020 we might be that much closer to the event's simple but powerful slogan: "Dignity for All".



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