

## BUILDING BRIDGES: REFOCUSED

### *Setting a Course for Reentry in a Second Chance Society*

On Tuesday, January 5, 2016 the ***Building Bridges: Refocused Conference*** was held with over 500 guests at CCSU in New Britain. This event was sponsored by Institute for Municipal & Regional Policy in collaboration with the CT Reentry Collaborative, and the Malta Justice Initiative. The day opened with special guest speakers CCSU President Jack Miller, BOR President Mark Ojakian, OPM Under Secretary Mike Lawlor, DOC Commissioner Scott Semple, and Hartford Mayor Luke Bronin.



OPM Under Secretary for Criminal Justice, Michael Lawlor, filling in for Governor Malloy who was in Washington, D.C. as President Obama was outlining gun control initiatives said, “Governor Malloy has two major priorities: criminal justice reform and transportation.” Lawlor gave some “big picture highlights” including the most important, reducing crime. Data from 2015 showed that CT reported the lowest crime rate since 1967. Index crimes (those with a victim) have dropped 28.3% since 2008. The number of arrests for all crimes in CT dropped 31.3% since 2009. CT’s prison population decreased by 14.1% since 2010. For the last 3 years, there have been fewer than 100 murders in CT.

On January 1, 2016, CT’s prison population was about 15,500, the lowest it has been since 1998. The number of new admissions has decreased by 25%. The number of those released to Probation has decreased by 26% since 2009. “Why is this happening? A combination of policy changes and what we’ve learned,” Lawlor said.

#### Lawlor highlighted several of the Governor’s Second Chance Society Initiatives:

- ◆ Decriminalization of marijuana possession
- ◆ Re-establish Risk Reduction Earned Credits
- ◆ Partnership with MADD establishing innovative mandatory sentencing with a special form of house arrest. The result has been 0% recidivism for those successfully completing this program.
- ◆ Elimination of the death penalty

Also, school zone offense elimination, expedited pardon hearings, and notification to every inmate regarding pardon eligibility are among the new initiatives for 2016.

The next phase for Second Chance Society will be to raise the juvenile age to 20 in combination with the U.S. Attorney General. This follows the extraordinary success of CT’s Raise the Age campaign which has resulted in fewer kids in detention and the decision to close the CJTS by 2018. The number of 17 year olds arrested has decreased by 60% since 2008 as a result of Raise the Age.

CT DOC Commissioner Scott Semple said in his remarks to the audience, “A bold change is happening in CT and we are starting to see what success looks like. . . we are following evidenced based practices because we need to change the stigma of incarceration and society needs to change its perspective also.” Referencing his June 2015 visit to European prisons, he said, “The facilities that we visited in Germany were treated inmates with dignity and hope.”



Commissioner Semple announced that by January 2017 another CT prison would be repurposed to focus exclusively on 18-25 year olds in the hope of having a generational impact. The focus of this facility would be to implement best practices based on brain development. The 18-25 year old age group represents about 20% of the total CT prison population (about 3300 inmates). Commissioner Semple said that just a 5% reduction in this population could yield a savings to the state of \$12 million annually.

# CT REENTRY VOICES

SHARING OUR SUCCESS & HOPE

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Commissioner Semple stated that another 110 inmates who are veterans at Cybulski Reintegration Unit in Enfield are now engaged in the reintegration curriculum there. He announced that on February 1, 2016, a similar reintegration program would open at York Correctional Institute. He cautioned that less offenders incarcerated does not make DOC's work easier. There is a corresponding obligation to ensure that community resources are in place to make the transition for the returning citizen successful.

The conference also featured a panel of returning citizens moderated by Wally Lamb, NY best-selling author and publisher of *Couldn't Keep It to Myself and I'll Fly Away*. Wally Lamb helped the panelists share their success stories in one-on-one interviews in a relaxing setting. The audience applauded enthusiastically after each story highlighted the importance of second chances. After the panel discussion concluded members of the Judy Dworin Performance Project, themselves returned citizens, presented a powerful song and spoken word performance called "In My Shoes."

Five well-attended afternoon workshops focusing on diverse areas such as trauma, advocacy, faith-based action, mental health/substance abuse, and police/community relations followed the lunch break which included an experiential session with DMHAS' Network Education Committee.



The afternoon concluded with key note speaker Walter Fortson of the Petey Greene Program who spoke about empathy, solidarity and the path to justice. Former New Haven Congressman Bill Dyson delivered a passionate wrap-up summary to the day and a call to action. He emphasized that the only way we are going to move forward with reentry in the State of Connecticut is for all of us to get up and "just do it." "Don't sit back or wait for anyone else but **just do it**", he exclaimed.

## SPECIAL HONORS



Congratulations to Dan Braccio, The Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport, who received the **FBI Director's Community Leadership Award** at the conference from FBI CT Special Agent in Charge Patricia Ferrick for his work with the Bridgeport Project Longevity program. Dan, who co-chairs the Bridgeport Reentry Collaborative, said in accepting his award "This award really mirrors all of the great work that all of you are doing around the state. I want to especially recognize those returning citizens who have contributed greatly to their communities as mentors, parents, change agents, employees, and entrepreneurs." Dan will travel to FBI headquarters in Washington, D.C. in April to be recognized with other nominees from FBI districts around the country.

## FAIR CHANCE EMPLOYMENT



More and more people are recognizing that our communities can be healthy and prosperous only if people with criminal records are given a real opportunity to support themselves and their families through employment. Unfortunately, many employers reject job applicants as soon as they learn that an applicant has a criminal record, even if the applicant is highly qualified for the job.

The Connecticut legislature is considering a bill to eliminate that barrier. **HB 5237, An Act Concerning Fair Chance Employment**, would ensure that employers first consider candidates based on skills and qualifications, not past mistakes. The state and major Connecticut cities have already enacted “ban the box” laws. HB 5237 extends “ban the box” hiring practices to all employers.

Employers could not ask questions about an applicant’s criminal history during the preliminary application stages. An employer would evaluate an applicant’s qualifications, interview selected applicants, and then make a conditional offer of employment to the applicant who best meets the employer’s needs. Only after making a conditional offer could the employer conduct a background check.

The law would not require the employer to hire the applicant if the background check reveals a criminal history that makes the applicant unsuitable for the job-- for example, an applicant for a bank teller job has a recent felony conviction for embezzlement.

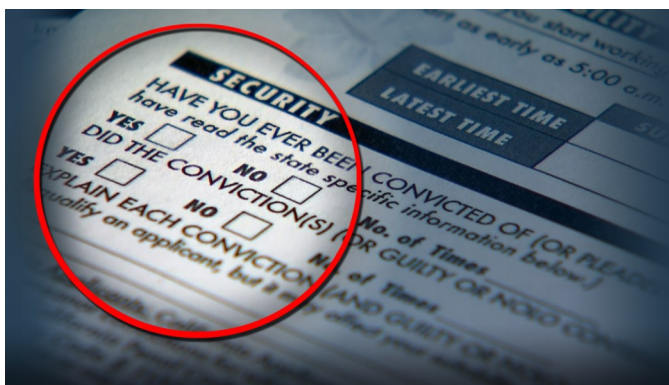
The Connecticut Fair Chance Employment Act is supported by the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus and a broad coalition of civil rights, religious, labor, and social justice organizations.

The Coalition needs your support to pass HB 5237!

- Ask your group or organization to endorse Fair Chance Employment.
- Contact your legislator to ask him or her to co-sponsor or at least vote for HB 5237.

Testify in favor of HB 5237 on Thursday, March 3<sup>rd</sup> in New Haven at a Labor Committee public hearing which will be at Hill Regional Career High School, 140 Legion Avenue, New Haven at 4:00p.m.

For more information, contact Arvia Walker, CT Fair Chance Coalition, (860) 944-7650 or [info@ctfairchance.org](mailto:info@ctfairchance.org). Website: [www.ctfairchance.org](http://www.ctfairchance.org) – Sue Garten





## I-BEST SECOND CHANCE PROJECT

On February 18, 2016, Governor Dannel Malloy along with Mayor Luke Bronin, Commissioner of the Department of Labor Scott Jackson, several other local mayors, funders and partners visited with a group of students who are returning citizens to the Hartford area and participating in a new program called **Best Chance**.

Students were able to speak directly with Governor Malloy and share their stories and struggles about coming out of incarceration and returning to their community. They shared how they are taking advantage of this program and look forward to the opportunities it will provide.



Once students complete workforce development and customer service training, they will select a career path in one of the three main training options. These options include culinary, construction or manufacturing. If students have not completed their high school education, Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) will be working with them to obtain their GED. They receive case management supports as well as stipends, transportation assistance, job placement and retention services.

This program is part of the Second Chance Society Initiatives put forth by Governor Malloy and being run by Capital Workforce Partners and funded by the Department of Labor. It is a collaborative effort with numerous partners to ensure the success of individuals returning home to Hartford County.

## STIGMA AND MERCY CONFERENCE



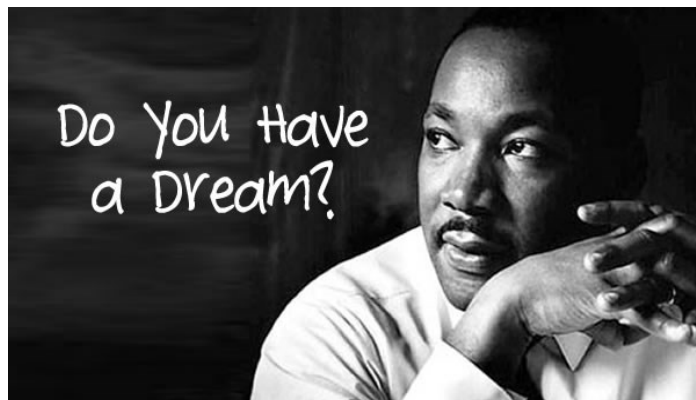
On February 20, 2016 at the First Congregational Church UCC in Guildford, over 120 people gathered for the Stigma and Mercy: Prison and Reentry Restorative Justice Conference. Keynote speaker, Commissioner of Department of Correction Scott Semple talked about the declining prison population. He believes in giving individuals the best opportunity for success. "We are all better off when we help people get back on their feet," he said, "to be a forgiving society."

Other highlights included success stories of individuals who have returned home. Many of them sharing their struggles of how they rebuilt their lives after incarceration through their words, paintings, photographs and music. The Judy Dworin Performance Project performed the song "Walk a Mile in My Shoes". The day was uplifting and inspiring to all who attended.

The Faith Congregational Church UCC in Hartford co-sponsored the event. Reverend Stephen Camp closed by saying, "Friends, if we walk away, and try to hide people away it will only ensure that people remain broken, and all of us will be diminished." Excerpts taken from [www.ctucc.org](http://www.ctucc.org).

## I HAVE A DREAM. . .

As we celebrate the life and contributions of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., I asked my class at Cybulski Community Reintegration Center to do a writing assignment. I asked them to finish the statement: I have a dream . . . Here are their responses.



. . . that regardless of race or financial status that people as a whole would treat others with love and respect more often. I have a dream that more people would care for others as well as this planet. I have a hope that before this world gets even worse than it already is that people would change their selfish, greedy, lustful and envious ways. I wish that more people would give and volunteer to help other people in need. — **H. M.**

. . . that every child has a mother and father in their life to help guide, love and protect them throughout their life, to teach them right and wrong. Also, let there be world peace and everyone helps and protect each other no matter what race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, social class, rich or poor. I dream that the ones who have made mistakes will be given a second chance instead of being frowned upon. I have a dream that every man, women and child never have to go a day or night starving or homeless. I have a dream that everyone would have equal opportunity to healthcare and education no matter rich, poor, young, old, male, or female. I have a dream that one day I will be the father of a child that will exemplify these values and be about changes that make our world a better place. — **F. G.**

. . . to one day be a father to my son. To wake him up for school in the morning, to fix him breakfast and get him dressed for the day, to bring him to school and pick him up, to be called for parent-teacher conferences when he is acting up or being good, to go to his plays, recitals or games, to get him ready for bed at night, to read him a bedtime story and tuck him in at night. — **P. G.**

. . . my dream is to someday be a productive caretaker to my children and before I leave this Earth leave them with the most things I can such as knowledge, wisdom and understanding – the values of life. To give them the best as long as I am alive and give them the happiness they deserve and to be remembered as a great father. — **A. C.**

. . . STRIDE has given me an opportunity to honestly look at where I want to go in my professional career and has reignited a desire to start my own business. Staying positive and taking one step at a time, I truly believe the sky is the limit. Spending quality time with family, world travel and making the right life choices, I will be able to do anything I dream off! (maybe,!!) — **M. A.**

. . . I don't dream because more than likely dreams do not come true. I have plans and goals because everything that I reap will be a direct reflection to all the hard work that I put in to obtain them. So if you plan right you will reach every last one of your goals and then life will feel like one big dream. — **R. T.**

. . . that gives me the opportunity to help the people that I care for be able to support themselves as a result of working for the company that I own. Not only my loved ones but anyone who may need an opportunity where opportunities may be limited because of situations that may not afford them chances because of having history of trouble with the law. Being in a position to help others provide for themselves and their families would be one dream that if I can live to see it happen that would make me feel a great sense of pride and show that regardless of the obstacles in my life, I was able to overcome and do something positive not just for me but for others that faced the same obstacles that I have. — **O. M.**

. . . that one day I will be a normal citizen and live a nine to five lifestyle and have a career and be a better father to my daughters than my father was to me. — **D. R.**

As you can see from their responses, these young men have hopes, dreams and goals for their futures. Let us all work together to help support these dreams become a reality by reducing the barriers and challenges they will face when they are released by providing them with a second chance.— **Sue Gunderman, STRIDE**

### CT REENTRY COLLABORATIVE ROUNDTABLE SCHEDULES

# CT REENTRY VOICES

SHARING OUR SUCCESS & HOPE

#### BRIDGEPORT

Dan Braccio, danbraccio@ccgb.org  
Bridgeport Parole Office  
1052 North Avenue, Bridgeport, CT  
3rd Thursday  
9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

#### GREATER HARTFORD

Sue Gunderman, sgunderman@qvcc.edu & Aileen O'Connor, aoconnor@csimail.org  
CT Nonprofits  
75 Charter Oak Avenue, Bldg. 1, Hartford, CT  
1st Thursday  
1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

#### NEW HAVEN

Clifton Graves  
NHFreshStart1@newhavenct.net  
Church on the Rock  
95 Hamilton Street, New Haven, CT  
3rd Tuesday  
11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

#### SOUTHEASTERN CT

Kia Baird, kbaird@ccc.commnet.edu  
Norwich American Job Center  
113 Salem Tnpk., Norwich, CT  
3rd Friday  
10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

#### WINDHAM COUNTY

Julie Scrapchansky, jscrapchansky@qvcc.edu  
Quinebaug Valley Community College  
742 Upper Maple Street, Danielson, CT  
4th Friday  
10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.



If you would like more information or would like to add an article for our next newsletter, please contact Sue Gunderman at [sgunderman@qvcc.edu](mailto:sgunderman@qvcc.edu) or (860) 932-4090.

