

# REDUCING STATEWIDE RECIDIVISM:

## CHECKLIST FOR LEGISLATIVE AND EXECUTIVE POLICYMAKERS



### WHY SHOULD RECIDIVISM REDUCTION BE A STATE PRIORITY?

All across the country, states have recognized that in order to advance public safety it is critical to break the cycle of reincarceration for the thousands of individuals returning home from prisons every year. Many states are tracking recidivism rates, setting reduction targets, and implementing policies that have been shown to reduce reoffense rates and supervision violations.<sup>1</sup> The potential benefits of these bipartisan efforts are clear—communities are safer and the growth in state prison populations and related costs are slowing.

### WHAT ARE THE KEY STEPS STATE POLICYMAKERS CAN TAKE TO REDUCE RECIDIVISM?

#### 1. Make recidivism reduction a state priority and a key measure of successful corrections and reentry policy.

- Identify key stakeholders from the different agencies and organizations that impact the reentry process in your state and hold them responsible for their role in advancing recidivism reduction goals
- Set a clear definition of recidivism, measure current recidivism rates within your state, and set reduction targets related to specific programs or policy changes
- Support the collection and reporting of recidivism and revocation data on a monthly basis to track progress and drive policy changes

#### 2. Develop a plan to implement policies and practices that research has shown to reduce recidivism.

- Ensure corrections and reentry-related resources are focused on the individuals who are most likely to reoffend
- Fund evidence-based programs and services at levels that meet the needs of high-risk offenders and ensure that they are implemented effectively
- Authorize the adoption of community supervision policies and practices that reduce the risk of individuals reoffending or violating the terms of their release
- Review laws and policies to determine if they undermine the goals and benefits of recidivism-reduction efforts and make modifications as necessary

#### 3. Track progress and ensure accountability for results

- Review recidivism data on a regular basis and hold agencies and programs responsible for progress toward meeting targets
- Provide incentives to agencies or jurisdictions for implementing practices that reduce recidivism and revocations
- Require that program quality assessments be conducted at least annually to determine the programs' recidivism reduction impact, and use that information to inform budget decisions

### Policy in Practice

#### Prioritizing recidivism reduction: Kansas

In 2007, Kansas policymakers invested \$7.9 million to increase the capacity of treatment programs and strengthen probation and parole. Between 2007 and 2009, state recidivism rates decreased more than 20 percent.

#### Implementing evidence-based practices: Wisconsin

In 2009, policymakers signed a law requiring that a validated risk assessment tool be used for triaging community supervision resources. The law resulted in a 25-percent reduction in community supervision officers' workload as resources were reallocated to individuals that were most likely to reoffend or violate the terms of their release.

#### Promoting accountability: Ohio

Ohio policymakers have demonstrated their commitment to implementing evidence-based practices by evaluating correctional and community reentry programs' impact on recidivism reduction. Based on recent studies, Ohio is canceling contracts with low-performing programs and restructuring other programs to produce better outcomes.

<sup>1</sup> This conclusion is based on results from a survey of state corrections departments conducted by the Council of State Governments Justice Center and the Association of State Correctional Administrators in January 2012.