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The Transition From Prison to Society

All prisoners face the same issues upon exiting prison, these include transitioning from their life in prison to their life in society as well as finding a way to maintain their place in society with a criminal record. It is hard for anyone who has never needed to overcome such barriers to imagine the hardship that prisoners go through after incarceration. Sociologists, politicians, and corporations are a few groups working towards building a better system and providing more opportunities for prisoners and their reentry into society. Preparing prisoners for life after prison and enforcing laws that make the job search easier will reduce recidivism and create a smoother transition from incarceration to society.

Reentry into society, after having been incarcerated for an extended period of time is often a very big challenge for prisoners. Max Kenner, founder of the Bard Prison Initiative, has come up with a solution for an easier transition for prisoners reentering society (Lois 2014). Kenner believes that providing prisoners with higher education opportunities while incarcerated will better prepare them for life outside of prison. Max Kenner says of his Bard Prison Initiative, "If they do that, not only will they be more fulfilled as people, but they'll be better prepared for release, be better neighbors, better citizens, better at any role they seek to fill later in life." Given the opportunity for a higher education, prisoners will be less likely to face hardships upon exiting prison. Typically, reentry means that prisoners must struggle to rebuild their life while also facing marginalization by their peers due to their criminal record. Ex-prisoners will then struggle to overcome the stigma of having been incarcerated. Though if a prisoner can

exit prison with a better form of education they will have a higher chance of being accepted back into society. Max Kenner further enforces this point by stating, "If they have access to an education like this one, the society at large is saying something more nuanced, more thoughtful and more caring to a person in prison than, 'You are a threat and you will carry a stigma and 'You will never be a fully recognized citizen in this democratic society again.'" A prisoner now has more career options upon exiting prison, thus building the foundation for an overall better life after incarceration.

Time spent while in prison has been taken care of through the Bard Prison Initiative, but another very big hardship must be overcome, and that is maintaining a valuable spot in society. The national rate of recidivism is a shocking 70 percent (Katel 2007). This is highly due to a lack of resources for prisoners exiting prison and looking to rebuild their life. Michael Jacobson, a former New York City jail employee states, "Look at the people who are coming out of prison – drug-addicted, mentally ill, no stable housing – of course they're going to fail parole. The system is set up for failure. The institutional mind-set is, 'We don't have enough money to deal with your issues, but we have enough money to catch you.' It's like shooting fish in a barrel." Jacobson makes a valid point about how we treat inmates while in prison and how that directly reflects on how they act when they exit prison. We are currently setting prisoners up for recidivism by not offering them the help they need for a healthy life outside of prison.

If and when a prisoner receives a job after incarceration his/her risk of recidivism is in-turn highly reduced. An estimated 65 million people in the United States have a criminal record (Katel 2012) and all 65 million will be sanctioned because of it. Employers must realize that many of these people will not return to their criminal

behavior, though many of them are not given the chance to prove themselves as honest and hardworking employees. Co-director of the National Employment Law Project, Maurice Emsellem, is trying to change that, "All we're saying is that there's got to be some reasonable assessment of risk and not to make blanket assessments. You want policy to reward good behavior. If you have a blanket disqualification, you're not promoting rehabilitation." Those carrying a criminal record deserve and need a better chance at being considered and obtaining a job. Ohio Governor John Kasich is enforcing laws that give people with criminal records a better chance at getting employed. Governor Kasich has eliminated the need to reveal a criminal record on a job application in the state of Ohio (Katel 2012). His efforts have proven successful; the state prison population has reduced by 6,000 inmates as a result of Governor Kasich's law enforcement. The initiative has been taken in the state of Ohio, now it is in the hands of all other states to do the same. As a country and a society it is our duty to eliminate the stigmas we place on those with criminal records and make for an easier transition from prison to society.

Prisoners are incarcerated for the crimes that they commit, and their time spent in prison is their consequence for their wrongdoing. Therefore, all members of society need to stop sanctioning these men and women upon their reentry into society since they have already received their punishment. A more helpful and successful transition from prison to society is essential to reducing recidivism. Reducing recidivism is accomplished through providing prisoners with a higher form of education and job opportunities, overall resulting in a smoother transition from prison to society.

Work Cited

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