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Back to society: editorial

Ohio's prisoner recidivism rates have dropped by 21 percent in less than a decade. They should fall even further if Ohio and the federal government continue to invest in prisoner re-entry programs.

These efforts include public and private nonprofit programs funded by the federal Second Chance Act, co-authored by U.S. Sen. Rob Portman (R., Ohio). They continue to enjoy bipartisan support. The legislation poured more than \$10 million into Ohio between 2009 and 2011.

The 700,000 people a year released from U.S. prisons include 22,500 from Ohio’s 28 state prisons. They face enormous obstacles, including problems with housing, employment, education, mental health, and substance abuse.

Re-entry programs help released prisoners, many of whom are returning to some of the nation’s poorest neighborhoods, overcome those hurdles through job training, treatment, transitional housing, and other services. Reducing recidivism by 10 percent nationwide would save more than a half-billion dollars a year in prison costs, while significantly reducing crime.

Ohio has emerged as a national leader in slowing prison’s revolving door. The state reported a prison recidivism rate of 31.2 percent for 2008 releases, the lowest since 1991. That compares with a national recidivism rate of about 43 percent.

Recidivism rates in Ohio have been dropping for a decade. Among prisoners released in 2005, 38 percent returned to prison within three years, compared to 34 percent of prisoners released in 2007, reports the Justice Center of the Council of State Governments.

That drop in recidivism rates resulted in nearly 1,300 fewer prisoners, saving Ohio taxpayers more than \$32 million a year. In Ohio, each prisoner costs an average of \$25,000 a year to incarcerate.

Gary Mohr, director of Ohio’s Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, deserves credit. During his 21-month tenure, he has engaged the department in preparing inmates to succeed, and helping them after they’re released.

Editorial continued here: <http://www.toledoblade.com/Editorials/2012/10/07/Back-to-society.html>

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