

Prisoner Reentry: Lessons for Governor's Offices



**Prepared for the
2007 Governor's
Criminal Justice Policy
Advisors Institute**

**Christy A. Visher, Ph.D.
Principal Research Associate**

**Seattle, Washington
March 9, 2007**

The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to The Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders.



Presentation Overview

Prisoner Reentry – defining the problem

Public opinion supports reentry efforts

What have we learned so far?

- Some programs “work”
- Large-scale implementation possible, but difficult
- Social and family context matter
- Released prisoners are *positive* about their futures

The role of state government



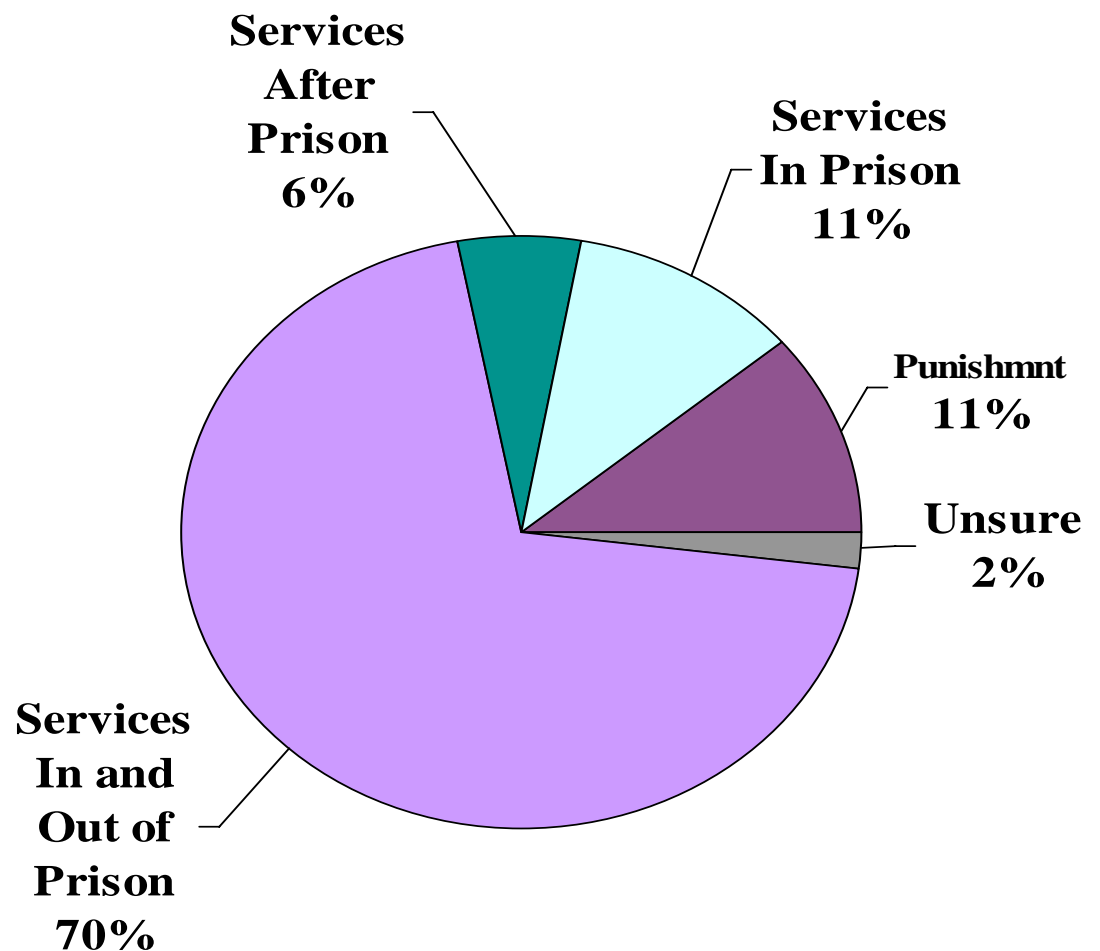
Prisoner Reentry: Magnitude of Problem

- 650,000 leaving state and federal prisons annually
- 12 million leaving local jails
- High recidivism rates
- Fiscal implications – \$60 B on corrections
- Impacts on families and communities acute
- Individual challenges are substantial

The Public Is Supportive of Reentry Approach

- 2006 NCCD/Zogby poll of 1000 U.S. voters
- 80% concerned or fearful about returning prisoners
- 87% believe prisons should attempt to **rehabilitate** inmates

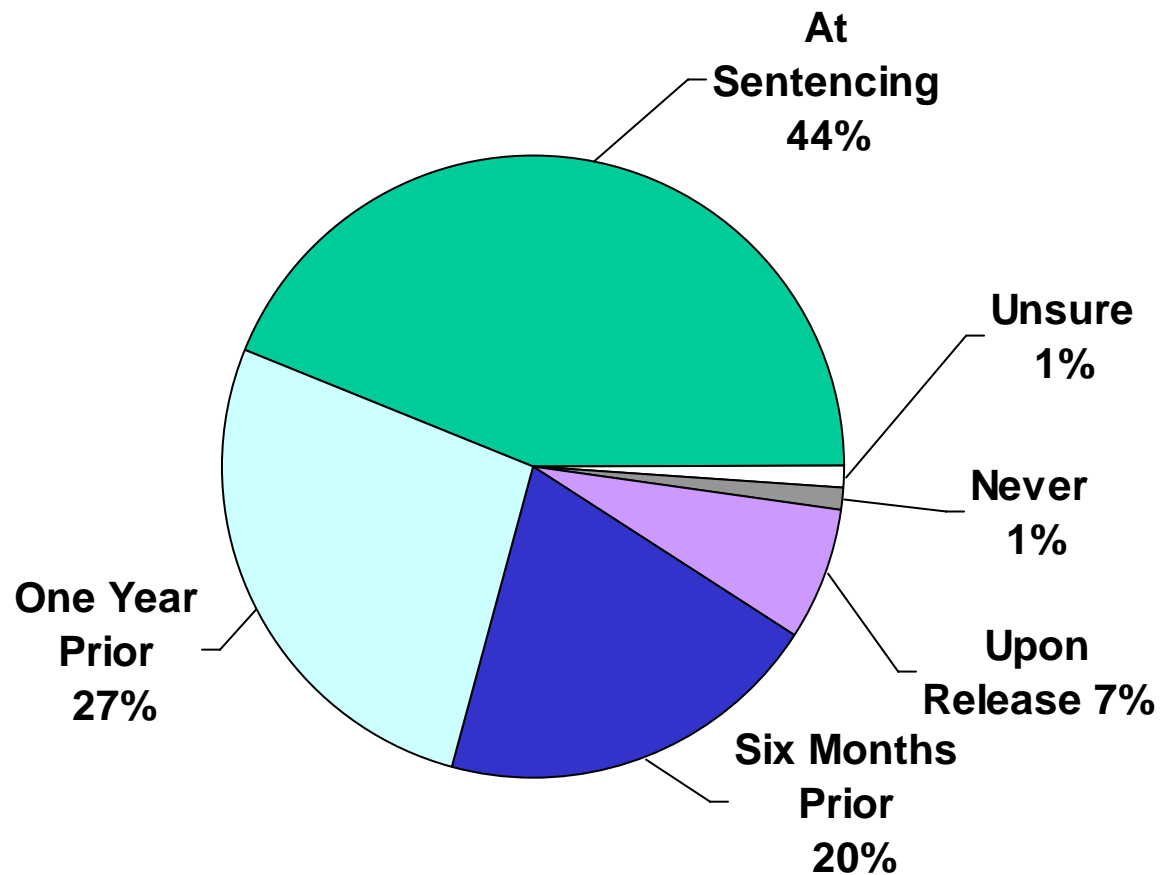
What would you prefer the state implement?



Source: NCCD/Zogby 2006

The Public Is Supportive of Reentry Approach

When Should Planning Begin?



- Lack of life skills, prison experience, and obstacles to reentry thought major factors in rearrest rates.
- Job training, drug treatment, mental health services, family support, mentoring, and housing = “very important” services that should be offered

Source: NCCD/Zogby 2006



Some Programs “Work”

Some programs proven to reduce recidivism and save money.

- Research Findings
 - Getting offenders into needed services and treatment works better than supervision and sanctions
 - Magnitude of effects depends on type of program, strength of implementation, and offender characteristics
 - Gap between research findings and actual practice

- Washington State Institute for Public Policy report
 - Several of the successful programs produce favorable returns on investment
 - Public policies incorporating these options can yield positive outcomes



Limitations of Research

- Reducing recidivism is a complicated matter
- No one “magic bullet” program
- Reductions in recidivism aren’t as big as we’d like, and don’t last for as long as we’d like
- Limited by evaluations of “programs” not “strategies”
- Comprehensive, collaborative strategies may be our best hope, yet to date they are untested

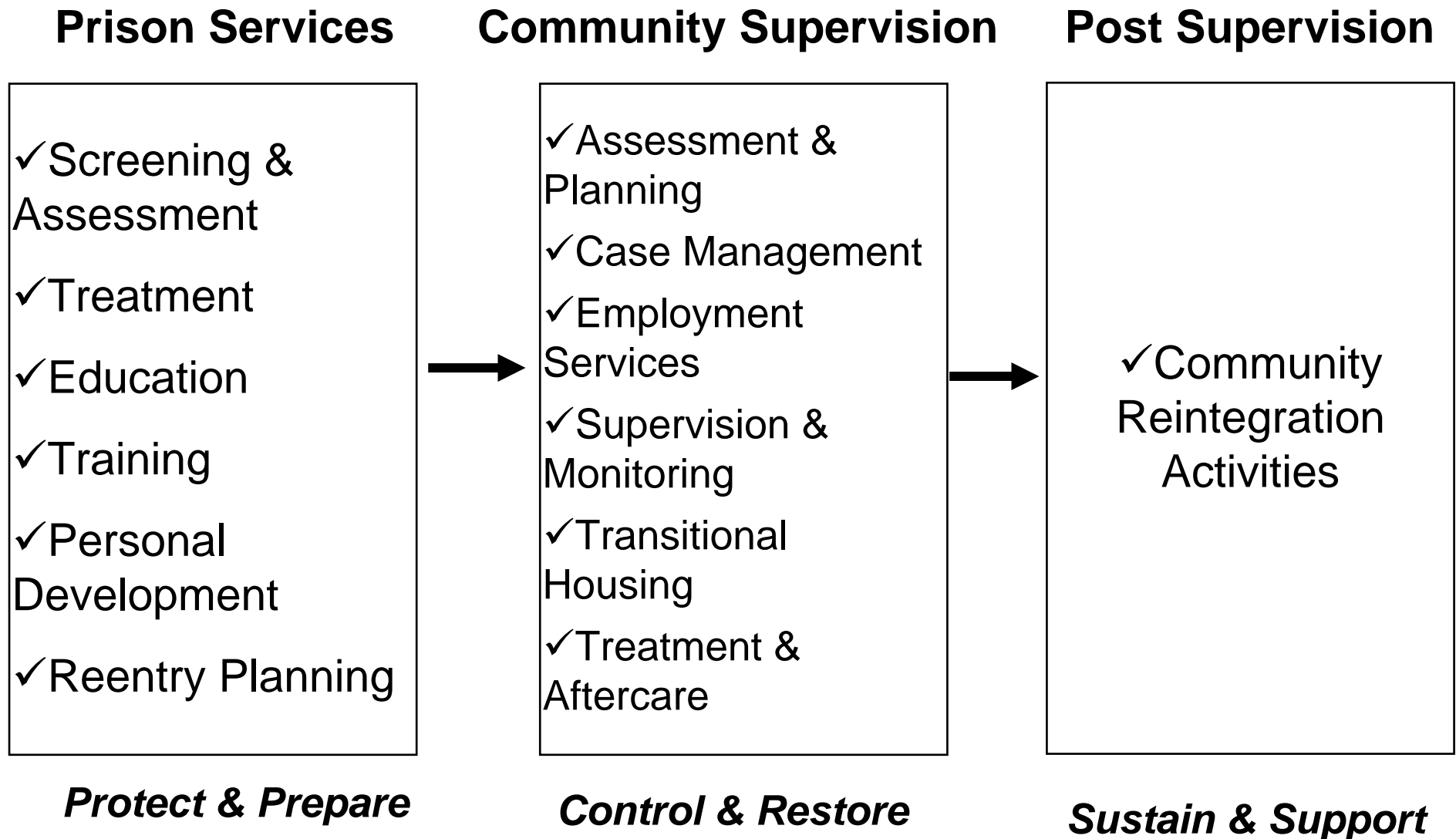


Large-scale Implementation Is Possible

Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative (SVORI)

- Focus on **serious, violent** offenders
- All states received awards and developed programs (2003)
- Comprehensive approach tailored to state's needs
- Collaborative effort between corrections and community service providers
- 5-year evaluation to assess implementation, impact of program, and cost-benefit results

SVORI: Stages of Reentry





Is SVORI Working?

Early reports are optimistic...

- Corrections and communities working together and delivering wide range of services
- SVORI participants getting more services than non-SVORI
- Most plan to continue (94%) and even expand (77%) programs

But several cautions.....

- While service levels are higher, *far* short of 100%,
- Program size small (50-100 offenders)
- Early outcomes positive but moderate
- Jury still out – 2 year recidivism and cost-benefit findings forthcoming

» www.svori-evaluation.org



Social and Family Context Matter

Preliminary findings from *Returning Home* study indicate:

- Family supports
- Positive family and peer influences
- Housing stability
- Safe and orderly neighborhood
- Employment
- Abstinence from drugs and alcohol
- Supervision conditions

... all matter in terms of reducing recidivism



Released Prisoners are *Positive* about their Futures

Vast Majority:

- Think they will not use drugs/commit crime after release
- Expect and receive support from families
- Will give up friends/hangouts that lead to trouble
- Want help finding job
- Think PO will be helpful and avoiding parole violation will be easy

BUT...



Putting It All Together: Prisoner Reentry and State Policy

There is a lot you can do...

Without new laws or regulations

- Get state agencies organized on reentry issue – initiate reentry task force; appoint reentry contact.
- Executive orders
- Removal of barriers
- Coordinate with business and nonprofit sectors as partners.
- Educate partners and the public



Putting It All Together: Prisoner Reentry and State Policy

And more....

- Without major costs
 - Consider changes in corrections policies surrounding moment of release, IDs, health documents
 - Develop release resource manual
 - Use volunteers

- With costs but expected returns
 - Allocate program dollars for evidence-based practices.
 - Support evaluation.



Putting It All Together: Prisoner Reentry and State Policy

State involvement in reentry is critical

- Not just a corrections problem
 - Think “policies and strategies”, not “programs”
 - Help organize comprehensive, collaborative approaches
 - Urge state agencies to work together
- Need state leadership to reduce recidivism and improve public safety



References/Resources

- ***What Works in Prisoner Reentry? Reviewing and Questioning the Evidence.*** (Petersilia, 2004)
http://www.uscourts.gov/fedprob/September_2004/whatworks.html
- ***Evidence-Based Public Policy Options to Reduce Future Prison Construction, Criminal Justice Costs, and Crime Rates.*** (Aos et al, 2006) <http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/pub.asp?docid=06-10-1201>
- **NCCD/Zogby poll** on attitudes towards reentry http://www.nccd-crc.org/nccd/pubs/2006april_focus_zogby.pdf
- **SVORI Evaluation** website <http://www.svori-evaluation.org>
- **Urban Institute** reentry findings
<http://www.urban.org/projects/reentry-portfolio/index.cfm>

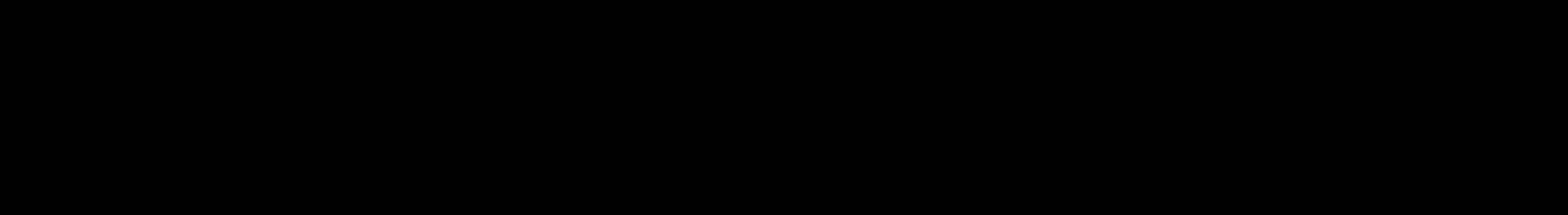


URBAN INSTITUTE
Justice Policy Center

**For more information on prisoner reentry, please
visit the Urban Institute website at:**

<http://www.urban.org>

**To receive monthly email updates of JPC research,
send an email to jpc@ui.urban.org**



The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to The Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders.