

## **Legislation to Assist People in Reentering Society from the Criminal Justice System** **Introduced in Congress**

On November 2<sup>nd</sup> 2005, Congressman John Conyers (D-MI) introduced H.R. 4202, the “Reentry Enhancement Act.” H.R.4202 would provide demonstration grants to States and local areas to begin to address the need for drug and mental health treatment, job training and education opportunities, and housing for individuals when they return to the community from incarceration. This legislation would also provide resources for the formation of a task force on Federal programs and activities relating to the reentry of individuals into the community and for research on reentry issues, including the impact of incarceration on families.

H.R. 4202 would also providing support for the review of various Federal and State barriers that bar individuals with criminal records from having access to employment opportunities, welfare benefits and housing. Additionally, the Re-Entry Enhancement Act would modify the ban on Federal financial aid for individuals with drug convictions by clarifying that only individuals who receive a drug conviction while enrolled will lose their eligibility for the specified period of time as opposed to the current law that delays or denies aid to individuals with past, as well as current drug convictions.

Other key provisions of this legislation include:

- Improving opportunities for residential substance abuse treatment and aftercare for individuals under the supervision of the State and Federal prison systems
- Requiring the Director of the Bureau of Prisons to establish pre-release planning procedures for Federal prisoners to ensure that a prisoner’s eligibility for Federal or State benefits is established prior to release
- Requiring that the National Institute of Justice research offender re-entry including studying children who have had a parent incarcerated and the likelihood that these children will later become involved in the criminal justice system
- Authorizing grant monies for state and local courts to create reentry courts
- Establishing a vocational assessment and training demonstration project for federal prisoners to provide enhanced skills development
- Restoring the right to vote in federal elections to non-incarcerated ex-offenders
- Prohibiting unwarranted employment discrimination on the basis of an individual’s criminal history

- Allowing certain incarcerated individuals to receive Pell Grants for student financial assistance
- Reforming Federal housing policies on evicting individuals or denying applications for tenancy in public housing facilities
- Removing the current restriction that prohibits individuals with felony drug convictions from receiving TANF benefits and food stamps

The Re-Entry Enhancement Act is co-sponsored by Representatives Charles Rangel (D-NY), Sheila Jackson-Lee (D-TX), and Robert Scott (D-VA). After being introduced, the bill was referred to the House Judiciary, Ways and Means, Education and Workforce, Financial Services, Ways and Means, Energy and Commerce, and Agriculture Committees where it awaits review. More information about H.R. 4202 can be found at: <http://thomas.loc.gov>.