



# KANSAS

KANSAS DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS  
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## **STATE AND LOCAL POLICYMAKERS CONSIDER OPTIONS TO AVERT RISE IN PRISON COSTS**

Legislators, state officials, and local leaders gathered at a criminal justice policy forum on Tuesday, December 12, organized by the Kansas Department of Corrections, Kansas Reentry Policy Council, Legislative 3-R's committee, and the Council of State Governments. The policy forum focused on the state's plan to reduce recidivism and policy options to slow the growth in the state's prison population.

The issue of planning for offender reentry has come to the forefront of social concern in recent years, with over 670,000 incarcerated individuals being released from prison nationally every year. In Fiscal year 2006, 5678 offenders returned to Kansas communities after having finished their prison term. Though the number of releases has remained relatively stable over the last 10 years, the trend in prison lengths of stay has continued to climb.

Based on projections by the Kansas Sentencing Commission, the prison population is anticipated to increase 26 percent over the next nine years. The cost of new prison construction and operating costs to accommodate this population increase will reach \$500 million dollars.

This alarming trend leaves Kansas policymakers with two options – either allow the system to grow along with the associated costs, or identify policy options to reduce the projected growth and its concurrent expenditures.

Many state policymakers have advocated the development of a justice reinvestment strategy: reduce recidivism; avert the cost of building and operating additional prisons; and improve conditions in the neighborhoods to which people in prison will likely return.

According to Governor Kathleen Sebelius, "Building more prisons does not solve our problems. We must continue to identify and pursue the most cost-effective ways of reducing recidivism and increasing public safety."

As part of its commitment to improve public safety, the Kansas Department of Corrections has embarked on an innovative offender reentry strategy, beginning with the opening of the Shawnee County Reentry Program in 2003. The program's positive reception by inmates, their families and the community, was soon followed by legislative support for additional programs and the Sedgwick County Reentry opened in January of 2006, with the Statewide Reentry Team opening its offices in September of 2006.

The reentry program, entitled *Kansas Reentry and Risk Reduction*, which offers comprehensive pre-release planning and community transitional services to its high-risk participants, has a broad base of bipartisan support from state and national legislators, as well as the support of national foundations, including the JEHT Foundation of New York.

The Pew Charitable Trusts has selected Kansas as one of eight states to receive the project's direct assistance in improving the performance of sentencing and corrections policies and programs. Working with the Council of State Governments and other partners, Pew's project provides nonpartisan research, analysis and expertise to help states such as Kansas identify data-driven, fiscally responsible policy options.

Secretary of Corrections Roger Werholtz said, "We consider ourselves extremely lucky to have such a broad range of support for this effort. It is only by working together as a nation, a state, and most importantly, a community that we can resolve the fundamental issue of significantly reducing re-offending behavior."

At the conference, national experts in the criminal justice field presented evidence-based policy alternatives, including the offender reentry model, to stem the tide of prison growth.

The conference was sponsored by the Kansas Department of Corrections, Kansas Reentry Policy Council, Kansas Recodification, Rehabilitation, and Restoration Committee, and the Council of State Governments.