



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT Incarceration and Prisoner Reentry in the African American Community

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African Americans are vastly over-represented in state prisons and juvenile detention facilities. We can expect that over the next five years an estimated 70,000 (mostly African American) adults will return to New Jersey communities from state prison. Their ability to reintegrate successfully will be compromised due to a lack of education, poor job skills, stigma from incarceration and host a of legal barriers arising from criminal convictions. While the state bears the substantial economic and social costs of incarceration and reentry, the impact is felt most severely by low-income communities of color that need resources to assist in their reentry. Facts to consider are:

- ♦ Of the men and women released in New Jersey in 2002, almost one-third (31%) returned to just two counties in the state, Essex and Camden -- from overwhelmingly African American neighborhoods.
- ♦ Since the 1970s, state spending on corrections, parole and juvenile justice has grown at twice the rate of the rest of the state budget. That means less money for education and other social programs.
- ♦ On average, 1,600 youth return home from juvenile justice placements annually in New Jersey. African American youth comprise 18% of the overall youth population, but 64% of youth in juvenile detention facilities.¹
- ♦ One in three black men between the ages of 20 and 29 years old is under correctional supervision or control.²
- ♦ Black women were 2.5 times as likely as Hispanic women, and 4.5 times as likely as white women to be incarcerated in 2004, usually for drug offenses.³
- ♦ People with criminal convictions are subject to laws and regulations limiting their ability to find jobs, housing, and qualify for benefits and educational aid.

- ♦ Voting strength and civic participation in minority communities is severely diluted by incarceration. In New Jersey people who are incarcerated, on parole, or even on probation cannot vote, and those convicted of indictable offenses lose their right to serve on a jury *forever*. Nationally, blacks are disenfranchised at a rate nearly five times higher than non-blacks.⁴
- ♦ The Census Bureau deems prisoners residents of the correctional facilities where they are housed (usually in more rural areas) rather than their communities of origin, where they are most likely to return. This counting method skews census data and prevents neighborhoods from receiving a fair allocation of essential public dollars which are necessary to develop reentry programs.⁵

1 - NJ RRI Revised Data (2002) at www.burnsinstitute.org/dmc/nj/; 2 - Mauer, M. & Huling, T., *Young Black Americans and the Criminal Justice System: Five Years Later* (Washington DC: The Sentencing Project, 1995); 3 - Harrison, Paige M. & Allen J. Beck, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear 2004* (Washington, DC: US Dept. of Justice, April 2005); 4 - Demos, www.demos-usa.org/page26.cfm; 5 - Allard, P. & Livingston, K., Brennan Center for Justice, *Accuracy Counts: Incarcerated People and the Census* (New York, 2004).

Who is Coming Home in New Jersey?

Data from 2002 release cohort (14,849)

- ♦ 91% male and 62% African-American
- ♦ 38% were drug offenders
- ♦ 39% were incarcerated for violation of parole
- ♦ 32% had been diagnosed with at least one chronic and/or communicable physical or menatal health condition.*
- ♦ 3.4% were identified as HIV+ or diagnosed with AIDS.*
- ♦ 6% were diagnosed with Hepatitis C.*
- ♦ 11% were identified as having a mental illness*

* Low estimates. Based on best available data.