



## **New Narrative for Our Justice System**

A Work in Progress, 9/9/09

### **All people can change**

Human beings are in a state of perpetual change, and this is what gives life its richness and meaning. Mistakes are one of the most powerful tools for learning and growth, and every single one of us makes them. No single action, good or bad, can fully define a person; a complex mix of experiences makes each of us a unique individual. Ex-offenders are human too. No one wants to be remembered forever for the worst action of their lives. Instead, each of us wants to be given a second chance to make things right and to be treated with forgiveness, grace, and mercy when we have harmed our families, our neighbors, or our communities. We believe in people's ability to change.

### **Invest in people to make our communities truly safe**

The purpose of our justice system is to assist people in changing their lives so that all of our communities are stronger and safer. Our justice system should promote healing for victims, communities, and ex-offenders themselves. Ex-offenders are talented, intelligent, and valuable people: sons, daughters, parents, and community members. We recognize that, like many people, ex-offenders are often people in need of support, treatment, education, opportunity, and a helping hand. We believe a justice system that invests in people will make our communities truly safe.

### **Our justice system must belong to all of us**

Every person, family, and community deserves to believe in the justice system and be served by it in positive ways. Decision-making about our justice system should include people, families, and communities affected by the system, as those with knowledge and experience of the system bring the best insight about what works and what should change. Family and community are central to an offender's successful reentry. The justice system also must honor family relationships and offenders' roles as parents, spouses, and family members. We believe our justice system must promote the involvement of families and communities in helping an offender repair their damage and strengthen the community to prevent future crimes.

### **We need a justice system that is just**

We believe in the inherent goodness of people and know that we are shaped by the systems, structures, and situations that surround us. Each of us has different opportunities that affect the choices available to us. Part of our response to crime must focus on addressing racial and economic inequities in education, job options, housing, health care, and more. In addition, our justice system itself must pay more attention to these differences. All people deserve to be treated equally, to be represented fairly, and to receive appropriate consequences whether they are rich or poor, black or white, or in trouble for a "street crime" or a "white-collar" crime. We need a justice system that lives up to its name.

### **There must be an ending point for punishment and a path to restoration**

Punishment must fit the crime, and no matter what the offense, people never stop being worthy of dignity and respect. This belief is central to creating the possibility of personal transformation. When offenders hold up their end of the bargain and serve the consequences for their actions, society must do the same. There must be an end to punishment and a point at which people are restored to full standing in the community without permanent marks against them. Our justice system must give people a real chance to live to their fullest potential. We believe every person deserves this chance to make up for their actions and contribute to the community.

***Every person is too valuable to be discarded.***

***Every person deserves another chance.***