



Built to Lead

For Immediate Release: 1/10/2016

GOVERNOR ANDREW M. CUOMO

13TH PROPOSAL OF GOVERNOR CUOMO'S 2016 AGENDA: LAUNCH A "RIGHT PRIORITIES" INITIATIVE THAT LEADS THE NATION WITH COMPREHENSIVE CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND RE-ENTRY REFORMS

\$100 million investment in community schools model to transform failing schools and other high needs schools

\$50 million investment in Urban Youth Jobs Program will help 10,000 more disadvantaged or at-risk youth find employment

Promote alternatives to incarceration to better rehabilitate at-risk individuals and break the trend of mass incarceration

Partner with Manhattan D.A. Vance to offer college-level educational programming in state prisons – made possible by \$7.5 million investment

Office of Court Administration to no longer sell criminal records information on individuals pardoned for youthful offenses; Governor continues push to Raise the Age

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo today unveiled the 13th signature proposal of his 2016 agenda: launch a "Right Priorities" initiative to further New York's status as a national leader in criminal justice and re-entry reforms. The Governor's proposal will help at-risk youth find positive opportunities in their communities, while also providing citizens who enter the criminal justice system the opportunity to rehabilitate, return home, and contribute to their communities.

"For all the progress we have made, far too many of our young people end up trapped in our criminal justice system with no path out – and it's time that changed," **said Governor Cuomo**. "It can't be that every door is closed except the revolving one back into prison. We must break this vicious cycle for the betterment and safety of our communities and countless families across the state."

The Governor's Right Priorities initiative will connect the dots into an integrated approach that will:

- Reform the pipeline that leads to jail and prison by expanding opportunities for employment and modernizing the justice system,
- Use the time in prison to change behavior,
- Zero in on the crucial period after release to provide guidance and support when people are most vulnerable, and
- Seek justice for 16 and 17-year olds.

1. Community Schools

The Governor is proposing investing \$100 million to support the transformation of failing schools and other high needs schools into community schools, so that issues of poverty can be addressed with communities working together to ensure that every student is prepared, safe, healthy and ready to learn. This kind of investment is critical to providing students early opportunities to build positive futures, and breaking the trend of higher crime rates among underserved youth.

This new investment in community school transformation will build on the Governor's 2013 initiative that invested \$30 million to develop 62 community schools in high-need school districts. Schools transforming into community schools were allowed to use grant funds of up to \$500,000 to support activities such as the hiring of a community school coordinator, before-and-after school mentoring, summer learning activities, and referrals and connections to medical, dental, and other social services.

2. Urban Youth Jobs Program & Workforce Training: \$55 million investment

Research published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has shown that providing at-risk youth with jobs is an essential way to steer them away from the criminal justice system, because employment is strongly correlated with the development of pro-social skills and training that promotes long-term well-being.

In 2012, Governor Cuomo launched the Urban Youth Jobs Program to combat unacceptably high unemployment rates among inner-city youth. Since its launch, the program has helped secure 31,239 jobs for youth at 1,565 New York businesses across targeted urban communities with high youth unemployment.

In response to the continued success of and demand for this program, in 2016, Governor Cuomo will invest \$50 million to significantly expand the size of the Urban Youth Jobs Program. This investment will allow the state to make 10,000 additional youth placements than the previous year, raising the number of youths placed in 2016 to 22,000.

Additionally, the Governor is proposing a \$5 million investment to train at-risk youth to join the workforce.

3. Alternatives to Incarceration

For more than thirty years, New York State has used alternatives to incarceration programs to reduce jail and prison overcrowding. These programs provide diversionary services, such as counseling, cognitive behavioral therapy and substance abuse treatment to improve public health and safety while saving the state money. Moreover, at the beginning of the program, most of the participants were individuals with alcohol and substance abuse issues. The approach works, and it needs to be expanded to meet demand.

As the criminal justice system has changed, alternatives to incarceration programs need to be modernized, making sure they divert people who, absent these services, are facing a high likelihood of jail and prison time. This year, Governor Cuomo will invest an additional \$1 million to expand and modernize ATI programs, making sure they focus on high-risk and high-need population.

4. Reduce criminal behavior through education

In the event that an individual does need to be incarcerated, we must ensure that rehabilitation remains a top priority. The presence of educational programming in prison is crucial to supporting an individual's reentry into the community and reducing the rate of recidivism. According to a [recent report](#) published by the RAND Corporation, individuals who participate in education programs in prison are 50 percent less likely to recidivate and return to prison, and participants are also 13 percent more likely to obtain post-release employment.

To help qualifying individuals earn degrees, complete a successful reentry and contribute positively to

their communities, the state will offer additional college-level educational programs at prisons operated by DOCCS. This expansion, made possible through a \$7.5 million investment of criminal forfeiture funds obtained by Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance, Jr., will provide approximately 1,000 individuals over five years with the opportunity to receive college-level instruction and earn an Associate's degree, Bachelor's degree, or industry-recognized certificate. Just over 1,000 incarcerated individuals currently receive college-level instruction in state prisons each year, and up to 500 more could be enrolled each year under this new program – potentially resulting in a 50 percent increase in yearly enrollment.

“Reentry programs are the most meaningful, cost-effective way to reduce recidivism and improve public safety,” **said District Attorney Vance**. “As a law enforcement agency, my Office will continue to enforce the law and seek prison sentences for those who are convicted of serious crimes and pose significant risks to others. However, sending someone to prison without a reentry strategy fails to recognize that individual’s potential for positive change and the eventual ability to reenter the community. Education programs give incarcerated individuals the best chance to get out and stay out of the prison system, breaking a harmful cycle of recidivism, and ultimately promoting public safety.”

CUNY’s Institute for State and Local Governance will oversee the grant process to interested and qualified educational institutions. SUNY and CUNY will be responsible for developing a set of standards for successful programs to be mirrored and implemented statewide, as well as facilitating a transition process that allows participants to continue their educational progress in the community after being released from prison. A third-party research entity will also be selected to evaluate the effectiveness of the program and its impact on recidivism and community reengagement upon an individual’s release from prison. Classes are anticipated to begin in the fall of 2016.

“The State University of New York is proud to be a part of the Criminal Justice Investment Initiative to help inmates prepare for academic and workforce success following their release from prison,” **said SUNY Chancellor Nancy L. Zimpher**. “Providing college access to this population will benefit not only those who take advantage of our programs as students but also New York’s economy and its communities across the state.”

“We are pleased to be a central part of this important initiative,” **said CUNY Chancellor James B. Milliken**. “A college education is vital to accessing opportunities. This will ensure that when inmates leave prison and return to our communities, they have the education and skills they need to pursue jobs and succeed.”

5. Provide transitional supports during the first six months after release

The six months immediately after a person’s release from the criminal justice system are the most crucial. In this period people are most likely to recidivate and to become victims themselves.

To break this cycle, the Governor’s re-entry agenda will include and coordinate the use of these temporary supports during this critical period:

- Transitional housing for people who need time to connect with family, get a job, or qualify for high need housing. Without transitional housing, returning citizens add to our homeless population and the possibility of finding a job and being accepted into a family’s home decrease.
- Connections to employment, including transitional employment, recognizing that without deliberate connections and incentives, employers can be reluctant to hire returning citizens, even though they can be among a business’s most hard working and loyal employees.
- Seamless provision of medical and mental health services through proposed Medicaid

funding from prison to the community for people with addiction, mental health needs and chronic medical conditions. These conditions, left untreated, would lead to overdose, grave illness and risk of homelessness.

6. Seek justice for 16 and 17 year olds

The Governor will re-introduce legislation to raise the age of criminal responsibility from age 16 to age 18, so that children are not subject to adult criminal proceedings except for serious crimes. Currently 16 and 17 year old youths end up with life-long adult criminal convictions, unlike in juvenile court, where records are generally sealed.

New York and North Carolina are currently the only two states that treat 16 and 17 year old youths as adults in the criminal justice system.

7. Restricting access to criminal records for pardoned individuals

Last year, Governor Cuomo [offered conditional pardons](#) to people convicted of nonviolent offenses at age 16 and 17 who have been conviction-free for 10 years.

To complement and bolster Governor Cuomo's action, the Office of Court Administration will restrict public access to the state court system's criminal history database when the Governor grants a pardon under this program. Currently, OCA sells criminal history information to individuals and companies. The court system will no longer sell criminal history information pertaining to individuals pardoned under this new program.

In addition, and as a separate measure the courts will now be fast-tracking criminal cases involving 16 and 17 year-olds who are detained in jail while their cases await trial, so that young people spend as little time as possible in adult jails before trial.

Chief Administrative Judge Lawrence Marks said: "Governor Cuomo should be commended for his efforts to improve how our state's criminal justice system treats young offenders. While we await legislative action to raise the age of criminal responsibility, the executive and judicial branches of state government can take action, within existing law, to ameliorate the unnecessarily harsh consequences of our current statutory scheme. Providing pardons to individuals who committed nonviolent offenses when they were 16 or 17 years-old and ensuring that those convictions are no longer sold to the public are important steps in the right direction. Similarly, according priority to the adjudication of cases involving 16 and 17 year olds will ensure that their cases are handled promptly and efficiently."

Jeremy Travis, President of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, said: "The criminal justice and re-entry initiative announced by the Governor today is big and bold. This impressive array of services and policy reforms ---from expanding alternatives to incarceration, to increasing college in prison, to a new emphasis on coordinated transitional services in the crucial period after release -- will ensure that New Yorkers leaving prison have the support they need to succeed, rather than return to crime. As a New Yorker, an educator and long-time advocate for successful re-entry policies, I wholeheartedly endorse this important Initiative. Governor Cuomo's proposals will make our state the national leader in smart and effective reentry policy."

Governor Cuomo has made New York a leader in the criminal justice and re-entry reforms. Specific achievements include:

- Closing 23 adult and juvenile prison facilities,
- Offering pardons for people convicted of crimes at a young age who have been crime-free for

at least 10 years,

- Instituting comprehensive reforms to the use of solitary confinement in state prisons,
- Implementing “fair chance” hiring for New York State agencies, and
- Ending discrimination based on a conviction alone for people seeking to live in New York-financed housing.

###

Additional news available at www.governor.ny.gov
New York State | Executive Chamber | press.office@exec.ny.gov | 518.474.8418