



Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable Quarterly Newsletter

June 2014

We are in full swing here at A/TCRRT and would like to share with you the latest reentry news at the local, state, and national levels.

Progress toward a Sobriety Center

Travis County and the City of Austin have jointly moved forward to work on creating a local sobriety center to address public safety issues related to public intoxication. On March 11th, the Travis County Commissioners Court [voted](#) to approve a resolution directing Travis County departments to work with City of Austin officials and other community stakeholders to develop a sobriety center. Similarly, the Austin City Council [voted](#), on March 20th, to approve a resolution directing the City Manager to work with Travis County and local stakeholders to develop an implementation plan and funding strategies for the sobriety center.

Austin City Council's "Housing First" Strategy

At the March 20th Austin City Council meeting, the Council [voted](#) in favor of a resolution directing the City Manager to develop a Housing First Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) project. Housing First is an evidence-based practice that yields considerable cost savings to communities by reducing the use of facilities, such as emergency rooms and jails, by the homeless population.

Travis County Sheriff's Office Announces 2nd Annual Vision Summit

Mark your calendar for November 5-7th for the 2nd Annual *Vision Summit, Looking Toward the Future of Reentry*. The targeted audience includes non-profits, government health and social service providers, faith based organizations, law enforcement, as well as formerly incarcerated and community members interested in assisting those transitioning from correctional facilities back into the community. Workshop proposals are being accepted through June 30th. Click [here](#) for details.

Restorative Justice Leader Will Be Missed

On the evening of April 22nd, Emmett Solomon passed away. After retiring as Director of the Chaplain's Office for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Emmett formed the Restorative Justice Ministry Network to address the needs of offenders returning to society and tear down barriers blocking their successful reentry. Reentry advocates and faith based communities across our state honor Emmett's legacy of hope, service, faith and redemption.

Texas Legislators Support EEOC Guidelines on the Use of Criminal History Information

On May 19th, fourteen Texas legislators joined in a [letter](#) expressing support for the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's (EEOC) [Guidelines](#) with respect to the use of criminal records in employment decisions. This letter comes in response to a November 2013 lawsuit filed by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott against the EEOC, *State of Texas v. EEOC*, challenging the guidelines. The EEOC's guidance does not prohibit the use of criminal background checks when employers screen job applicants. Instead, the EEOC provides guidelines to employers to consider factors such as the time elapsed since the criminal conduct occurred and the relationship between the criminal conduct and the job sought. In their letter to General Abbott, the Texas lawmakers argue in favor of reducing barriers to employment for those persons with criminal histories who are "ready, willing, and able to work," and note that "studies have repeatedly found that ex-offenders who are employed are much less likely to recidivate."

Texas Legislative Updates

Co-Occurring Mental Health & Substance Use Disorders: On April 22nd, the Texas House of Representatives convened a joint interim hearing of the House Committee on Corrections and the House Committee on Criminal Jurisprudence to "examine the association between co-occurring serious mental illness and substance abuse disorders and parole revocation among inmates from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice." The Texas Criminal Justice Coalition (TCJC) recommended that the state implement a criminal justice system-wide risk assessment; establish safe, effective, cost-efficient alternatives to incarceration, better-equip the community to respond to the needs of those with co-occurring disorders, and many other strategies. For more information, see [TCJC testimony](#), the [full hearing broadcast](#), and media coverage ([The Texas Tribune](#) and [KTBC](#)).

Expanding Limitation of Liability to Landlords: On April 28th, the House Committee on Judiciary & Civil Jurisprudence heard testimony on the interim charge to "study the potential issues involving civil liability for interacting with ex-offenders," among related matters. TCJC recommended that the limitation on liability provided to employers should be extended to landlords who choose to lease or rent to individuals with a criminal record in order to help such individuals stabilize their living situation, better support their families, and live law-abiding lives in our communities. For more information, see [TCJC testimony](#) and the [full hearing broadcast](#).

Community Advancement Network Presentation

Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable representatives David Kirk, Jeri Houchins, Darwin Hamilton, and Lesley Balancier gave a reentry awareness [presentation](#) to the Community Advancement Network (CAN) Community Council on April 21st. This year, the CAN Community Council is focusing each of its meetings on delving into the issues and challenges faced by several vulnerable populations, one of which is individuals with a criminal history. See the PowerPoint presentation [here](#).

NATIONAL NEWS

Increased Funding for Mentally Ill Offender Treatment and Crime Reduction Act in FY 2015

On April 30th, the U.S. House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce-Justice-Science approved the FY15 federal spending bill that funds Department of Justice programs. The bill provides **\$27.8 billion** for DOJ programs in FY2015, an increase of \$383 million over current spending. Under this bill, the Mentally Ill Offender Treatment and Crime Reduction Act (MIOTCRA) would receive \$9 million. It received \$8.2 million in FY14. Read the subcommittee draft text of the legislation [here](#), as well as the [Senate's](#) and [House's](#) letters to their respective appropriation committees regarding this bill.

Support Second Chance Act Reauthorization

Congress is in the process of considering the reauthorization of the Second Chance Act (SCA). Please consider joining the A/TCRRT in urging Members of Congress to support the SCA. To view the SCA Fact Sheet, [click here](#). To learn more about how you can support this effort, [click here](#).

A/TCRRT Organizational News

- The A/TCRRT Planning Council has begun the process of developing a Three Year Strategic Plan. Kris Donley, Executive Director of the Dispute Resolution Center, facilitated the initial work session on April 4th. The Strategic Plan will be completed this summer. Special thanks go to Kris and her staff for their hard work, outstanding expertise, and warm hospitality.
- Since our March newsletter, Lauren Johnson has become a citizen representative of the A/TCRRT Planning Council. The Planning Council is the governing body of the A/TCRRT. It is made up of a body of stakeholder representatives that provide the general oversight of the collaborative and assure that the work of the A/TCRRT is consistent with our mission and vision.
- Laura Sovine has unanimously been voted the Vice Chair of the Planning Council. As Vice Chair, Laura will be on the Executive Committee and transitioning into the Chair position in FY 2015. Laura is currently the Chair of the Support Systems Committee and is the Social Services Program Administrator at Travis County Health and Human Services and Veterans Services.

As you can see, 2014 is already a busy and promising year for us at A/TCRRT on every level of reentry. Look for more developments as the year goes on! And as always, the Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable wants, needs, and IS you!

Find out more about how you can [get involved](#).

Jeri Houchins
Administrative Director

Email: jeri.jeanw@gmail.com
Landline: (512) 873-4959
Cell: (512) 662-2005

www.reentryroundtable.net

[Join Our Mailing List!](#)

In This Issue

Quick Links

[Travis County Resource Guide](#)
[Texas RioGrande Legal Aid Reentry Guide](#)
[A/TCRRT Planning Council Membership Calendar](#)
[More About Us](#)

Save the Dates!

Evidence-Based Practices Committee

Date: June 2, 2014
Time: 11:30 am - 1:00 pm

Xoffenders' Council

Date: June 2, 2014
Time: 5:30 - 8:00 pm

Planning Council

Date: June 9, 2014
Time: noon - 1:00 pm

Support Systems Committee

Date: June 17, 2014
Time: 2:30 - 4:30 pm

More Information on Reentry

Interest in reentry is expanding around the country. The Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable has a page on its website where you can find resources for keeping up with nationwide information about reentry. To see it, click [here](#).