



**Testimony of Community Resources for Justice  
to the Special Commission on Correctional Funding  
Regarding Mental Health and Substance Use Treatment  
March 5, 2020**

Dear Sens. Brownsberger and Fattman, and Reps. Day and Whelan, Sherriff's and distinguished Commission Members:

On behalf of Community Resources for Justice, a provider of reentry services in Massachusetts and the Northeast, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the Commission's critically important work.

Community-based residential reentry programs play a central role in the effort to support individuals with behavioral health needs, including mental health issues and substance use disorders in the Commonwealth. These programs assist people through the transition home after incarceration, providing linkages to support and treatment programs in the community, as well as tools and resources to overcome the barriers facing them.

As many of you know, residential reentry programs have been dramatically underfunded since the 1980s, leading to the closure of most of them, and the Legislature has been working to restore and reestablish them as part of criminal justice reform. The Commonwealth now offers these important transitional supports in Boston, New Bedford, and Springfield, and is working to add beds in Worcester and Merrimack Valley.

Nationwide, individuals with behavioral health needs, including mental health issues and substance use disorders, are overrepresented in the criminal justice system. Without robust treatment and support, these needs often compound each other and contribute to higher rates of recidivism, driving up correctional costs and trapping people in cycles of incarceration. The results are often devastating – in Massachusetts, individuals recently released from incarceration [are 120 times more likely to die of an opioid overdose](#) than those with no history of incarceration.

But innovative, evidence-based treatment programs – both in correctional settings and in the community – are effective strategies to break those cycles.

Behavioral health programs within correctional settings should focus on assessing and identifying needs and then developing comprehensive treatment plans that include psychiatric medication, medication-assisted treatment (MAT), counseling, case management, and peer support. The [Federal Bureau of Prisons reports](#) that well-designed, carefully implemented substance use treatment programs for incarcerated individuals reduce recidivism and lead to greater levels of education and employment after their release.



Residential reentry programs provide individuals with a seamless transition so they can continue participating in counseling and treatment, as well as receive help finding employment and housing, and reconnecting with family as they rejoin their community.

Included with this submission are the following reports with additional information:

- Crime and Justice Institute, a division of Community Resources for Justice, 2020. *Prison Mental Healthcare: Overview and Best Practices.*
- American Society of Addiction Medicine, 2020. *Access to Medications for Addiction Treatment in Correctional Settings State Brief.*

Thank you again for your time attention. We appreciate the opportunity to offer our thoughts and participate in this important process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deborah M. O'Brien". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Deborah M. O'Brien, BS, RN, MPA  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
Community Resources for Justice