

Advocacy in Action



lutheran metropolitan ministry | April 2023

Restoring the Returned: LMM Leads Cuyahoga County's Reentry Week Activities

The last week of April marks "National Reentry Week," a time dedicated to uplifting the opportunities – and challenges - returning citizens encounter. LMM supported the Office of Reentry's programming by planning and hosting a two-part People's Reentry Assembly, a Chopped4Change cooking competition and the third annual Charles R. See Forum on Reentry.



Sharing one's story can be challenging but when done well it has the power to move hearts and minds. To help returning citizens hone this skill, LMM planned and hosted the People's Reentry Assembly Storytelling Workshop on April 15. The workshop provided justice-involved individuals the opportunity to tell their story as a way to process their experiences and conduct advocacy. LMM, in partnership with the Greater Leadership Coalition's Advocacy and Policy Committee, then hosted a breakfast for elected officials from the City and County, foundation leaders and nonprofit stakeholders during Reentry Week.

Over 60 community leaders attended this event which focused on the need to advance fair chance hiring policies and fair chance housing ordinances locally. Returning citizens were given space to share their stories and explain how collateral sanctions created barriers to finding stability post-release.

Chopped4Change Cooking Competition

With the recent expansion of our culinary student base to include men from Grafton Reintegration Center, students put their skills to the test against the women from Northeast Reintegration Center in the first ever Chopped4Change competition. Students went head-to-head like the chefs on the hit show 'Chopped' by opening mystery baskets with surprise ingredients, showing their skills and abilities to a group of enthusiastic onlookers and judges.

We're proud of all of our talented students for putting their culinary skills to the test. Congratulations to the team from the Grafton Reintegration Center on their big win! (Photo by Michele Lenni)



From the Desk of the Advocacy Director



Dear LMM Community,

In addition to this being Reentry Week, you may have also seen that April marks Fair Housing Month. Fair Housing Month commemorates the passage of the Fair Housing Act, landmark civil rights law signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson on April 11, 1968 that made it illegal to discriminate in housing transactions because of race, color, national origin, religion, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, and familial status.

The intersection of these two celebrations is fitting as they provide evidence of how far we've come - the Fair Housing Act is 55 years old this month - and how far we need to go - criminal background is still not a protected class under the Fair Housing Act.

At LMM we often say Housing is a Human Right and that all individuals deserve access to safe and affordable housing. Despite this mantra, it can be incredibly difficult to find housing for individuals with prior justice involvement, and the lack of existing protections can lead people into extended stays in shelter or back into the justice system. LMM has launched some creative solutions including a shared housing model and a transition in place program for those with more severe offenses, but much more work must be done to eliminate existing barriers to finding a home.

LMM will continue to work to provide education and awareness on the need to eliminate housing related collateral sanctions and also create programs that solve where the current law falls short. We invite you to join in these efforts to lessen demand for shelter and improve rates of post-release success.

Best,

Margie

Beyond Ban the Box: It's Time to Re-Think Hiring

Employment is one of three main factors to preventing recidivism post-release, with housing and transportation being the other two. This makes employment related collateral sanctions especially detrimental to the well-being of a returning citizen. To lessen the barriers to employment faced by returning citizens and promote a diverse workforce, organizations are increasingly adopting fair chance hiring policies.



One common fair chance hiring practice is “banning the box” that would typically require someone to check that they had a criminal record. Employers then only look at criminal history late in the hiring process. Fair chance hiring also takes each individual's unique experiences into consideration when making hiring decisions. The benefits of fair chance hiring include less room for bias in the hiring process, a more diverse workforce, and a workforce comprised of hard working and reliable employees. LMM is proud to utilize many fair chance hiring practices and would encourage your organization to consider doing the same.

To learn more about what it means to be a Fair Chance Employer, watch the third annual [Charles R. See Forum on Reentry](#).

POLICY CORNER:

SB 288 Takes Effect

On January 3, 2023, Governor Mike DeWine signed into law [Senate Bill 288](#), bi-partisan criminal justice legislation that eliminates some collateral sanctions, modifies Ohio's drug offense laws, and strengthens penalties for domestic violence offenders.



Relevant to the LMM's program participants, are provisions that improve expungement and sealing processes, increase the maximum amount of credit that can be earned by participating in prison programming and improve the state's response to incarceration during times of crisis.

Being able to seal one record - or in other words keep private, with limited exceptions - or expunge their record - meaning it is destroyed altogether - is core to being fully restored post-release. SB 288 legislation shortens the waiting period for sealing a record to 6 months for misdemeanors and 3 years for third degree felonies. It also allows individuals to apply for expungement 3 years after sealing a misdemeanor and 10 years after sealing a felony. The legislation also allows prosecutors or city law directors to expunge low-level marijuana possession offences.

Further, SB 288 allows incarcerated individuals to shave time off their sentences by participating in prison programs and earning credit. Prior to SB 288, only 8% of a credit could be reduced through earned credit. Now 15% can be reduced through earned credit which will likely benefit students in LMM's vocational training programs.

Finally, this legislation addresses judicial release during a state of emergency. The bill creates a new program in which the ODRC can request judicial release for incarcerated individuals with 80% of their sentence complete and who meet certain requirements. This aligns with LMM's involvement with the [Compassion Over Cages Campaign](#).

We are grateful to see Ohio's General Assembly take steps to reduce rates of recidivism and provide second chances to restored citizens. LMM will work to communicate these opportunities to the people we serve.

Featured Advocacy Partner: Cuyahoga County Office of Reentry (OOR)



The Cuyahoga County Office of Reentry (OOR) was established in 2009 as an organizational structure that supports reentry research, community education, and best practices in the delivery of services for reentrants. Reentry is the process by which an incarcerated person is released from jail or prison and makes the transition back to their community. The Office of Reentry is committed to strengthening a network of community partners by coordinating innovative programs and services that assure quality opportunities needed for a successful reintegration. We do this by serving as a funder, convener, and collaborator of policy makers, community leaders, and service providers that identify reentry challenges. These partners work together to target comprehensive resources and cost-effective solutions that helps individuals reach their ultimate goal of becoming a restored citizen.

The Cuyahoga County Office of Reentry and its community partners are proud to present the 2023 Reentry Week: Restoring the Returned. This year's events and programs took on a holistic approach that focused on the impact and effects of incarceration on the entire family. There was a greater focus on events that highlight juvenile justice, adult restoration, and children of incarcerated parents. We are extremely excited to amplify the voices of the reentry community!

To learn more about the Office of Reentry and the 2023 Reentry Week, follow them on [Twitter](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#) or visit our [webpage](#). If you have any questions, you can reach out to the Office of Reentry directly at Cuyahoga-Reentry@jfs.ohio.gov.



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Our Mission:

To promote shalom (peace, well-being) and justice (right relationships) through a Christian ministry of service and advocacy with those who are oppressed, forgotten and hurting.

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By the Numbers: Returning to Community

Each year thousands of individuals leave prison and must navigate legal and administrative collateral sanctions post release.

3,500

The number of people who return to Cuyahoga County from jail or prison each year

850

The number of employment related collateral sanctions in the state of Ohio

1,100

The total number of collateral sanctions in the state of Ohio

33%

The percentage of African American men in the United States with a felony

8%

The total percentage of adults in the United States with a felony

In The News: Youth Drop-In Center Update

On behalf of the project partners, we are disappointed, but not discouraged, that a small group of neighbors have taken legal steps to prevent the opening of the drop-in center at 4100 Franklin Blvd., despite a unanimous, favorable Board of Zoning Appeals variance ruling, as well as a strong show of support from many residents of Ohio City as demonstrated by the approval vote at the Franklin-Clinton Block Club. As a result of the neighbors' actions, the building project is on hold at the moment as our legal team continues to work on paths to final approval.



Having devoted substantial energy and time to planning and designing the drop-in center we and our partners are moving forward with our plans to provide Cleveland's first drop-in center for young people experiencing housing instability. This has been the longtime dream of the young people on the REACH Youth Action Board and A Place 4 Me, and we are looking forward to opening the doors together.

What We're Reading & Watching

- New York Times: [How Do People Released from Prison Find Housing?](#)
- The Land: Op-Ed: [It's time to renew the fight against housing voucher discrimination](#)
- Signal Cleveland: [What are the 'exit ramps' from incarceration in Cuyahoga County?](#)
- Ideastream: [The Bail Project in Cleveland is gathering hundreds of examples to show cash bail is not necessary](#)