# FACT SHEET Improved Reentry Services

Strengthen Communities and Reduce Spending on Prisons

### The criminal justice system in Kansas is broken. We can fix it.

Our state's criminal justice and prison system costs too much, needlessly incarcerates too many, works against those trying to make a fresh start, and is permeated by racial disparity. The state's crime rate has fallen consistently, but the Kansas prison population has quadrupled from 2,300 in 1978 to 9,700 in 2014.

Keeping 9,700 Kansans, many of them non-violent drug offenders or individuals with mental illnesses, in prison cost taxpayers \$236 million in 2014. The total rises by millions more when local government spending on correctional facilities is included.

This broken system can be fixed. But to do that, Kansas needs smarter justice policies—ones that will strengthen communities, reduce the number of incarcerated people, and reduce costs. With smarter justice policies, taxpayer money now spent on prisons could instead be used to invest in education, healthcare, and crime prevention.

### Kansas does not do enough to prepare prisoners for life after they complete their sentences.

The number of prisoners in Kansas continues to increase, but those individuals are not being prepared for life once they have completed their sentences. Once they re-enter the community, they are at a great risk for returning to prison. Within three years, 33% of those released from a Kansas prison will have returned. That recidivism rate is much better than the national average of 68%. Still, Kansas lacks adequate resources, inside and outside of correctional facilities, to assist individuals in reentering the community. These services are essential to help individuals transition back into community and have a second chance. Effective programs exist in Kansas and have

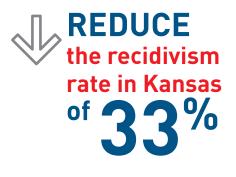
significantly contributed to the state's relatively low recidivism rate. But even more progress could be made, and even greater community safety attained, if these programs received more funding and support.

Reentering citizens face numerous problems when they return home. Many were already in financial distress before they were imprisoned. Lack of education, community supports, substance abuse treatment, housing, and employment opportunities are the main challenges that ex-offenders face.

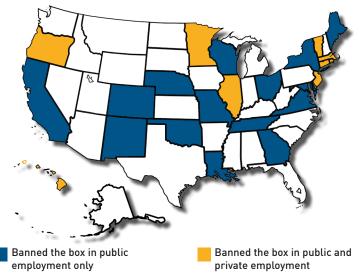
It is difficult for people with a criminal record to find jobs. They have to disclose their criminal history on many job applications, often leading to immediate

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# REENTRY SERVICES CAN



## **States That Have Banned the Box**





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screening out of the process. Kansans who have been to prison are less likely to have graduated high school or college, and have limited opportunities as a result. Exoffenders are often unable to obtain a driver's license, and so lack reliable transportation even to those jobs they may be able to find.

A 2006 study found that nearly a quarter of those released from prison in Kansas were homeless, with nowhere to go. Even prisoners who claimed to have living arrangements made before their release found reentry more difficult than they expected and were 7 times more likely to end up in a homeless shelter. The same study found that more than a third of Kansas offenders had been diagnosed with alcohol or substance tance abuse addiction. Without adequate resources for treatment out of prison, many of these individuals relapsed and returned to prison.

## "Banning the box" is a common-sense solution that will reduce recidivism.

Kansas should "ban the box" on applications for state employment. "Banning the box" means no longer forcing job seekers to disclose their criminal history at the start of the job application process. When ex-offenders check the "yes" box on an application's question about their criminal history, they essentially remove themselves from the applicant pool, limiting their ability to find a job to support themselves and their families.

That's why 24 states and hundreds of municipalities including Topeka, Wichita, and Wyandotte County—have banned the box on applications for most public sector employment opportunities. Federal agencies now delay probing into an applicant's criminal history until later in the hiring process.

Banning the box does not require employers to hire exoffenders. It simply does not allow employers to screen out applications before an individual's other relevant qualifications are considered, giving individuals a second chance.

Although Kansas should move to immediately ban the box on state employment applications, it should also ban the box for private employers. Nine states have already done so. States that ban the box see reduced rates of recidivism. Communities are strengthened and crime prevented when ex-offenders are able to work, earn income, pay taxes, and bring structure to their lives.

## Support for reentry services saves taxpayers money and strengthens communities.

In addition to banning the box, Kansas should take other steps to improve reentry services. Action must be taken both while individuals are incarcerated and after release. Prison staff should help inmates prepare for their release from the first day they arrive. Steps that can be taken include expanding access to educational



Provide ex-offenders with a real second chance.

Strengthen communities and reduce longterm costs of the criminal justice system.

opportunities, job training, life skills courses, and mentoring programs. The proven, evidence-based programs currently operating in Kansas should receive significant increases in funding. Increased funding should be made possible thanks to cost savings generated through other criminal justice reforms that reduce the costs of prison.

Returning citizens should have adequate access to substance abuse treatment and mental health services. Substance abuse and mental health conditions are significant contributors to incarceration. Treating these conditions is a powerful and effective way of reducing recidivism. It is also much cheaper, with treatment costing 77% less than incarceration does—just \$3,600 annually, compared to the \$18,000 annual cost of incarceration. By focusing on prevention and providing evidence-based community services, we can **reduce recidivism in Kansas and save significant amounts of taxpayer money.** 

On average, providing substance abuse and mental health treatment costs taxpayers

77% less than incarceration.