

For Immediate Release



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February 13th Marks “Second Chance Day” at the Capitol

On Wednesday, February 13th, at 11:00 a.m. in the Capitol Rotunda, over 1000 ex-offenders, community members, and supporters of justice reform will come together to highlight the importance second chances. Speakers at the Second Chance Day on the Hill will include: Robert M.A. Johnson, Anoka County Attorney; Dr. Les Green, former chair of the Minnesota Corrections Board and current head of the Cultural Diversity Department at St. Cloud State University; John Poupart, former Ombudsman for Corrections and current president of the American Indian Policy Center; Senator Julianne Ortman; and Representative Michael Paymar.

Currently 155,000 Minnesota adults are under some form of correctional supervision; 142,000 on probation, 4,200 on some level of supervised release, and 9,100 in prison. At least that many additional people have a criminal record who have satisfied all the requirements of their sentence. This means that one in sixteen Minnesotans must overcome the stigma of a conviction to qualify for housing, employment and student loans, among other things.

And the prison population is growing rapidly. It is now five times larger than it was only 25 years ago. Every year, more than 6,000 people are released from Minnesota prisons and expected to reintegrate into society. Two-thirds of those people return to prison within three years of release for committing a new crime.

Why do people go back to prison?

We have over 200 legislative collateral sanctions that continue to punish people with criminal records after they have served their sentence. They restrict a person from pursuing certain careers and obtaining professional licenses, and they limit housing options and access to education. Employers and landlords are afraid to employ or rent to ex-offenders, because they can be held liable for the employee or tenant's behavior, further inhibiting ex-offenders' ability to access the pro-social things they need to survive.

Beyond systemic barriers, the evolution of technology and information has seen the advent of private industry instituting background checks, the likes of which were previously limited to national security. And the companies who gather information for those background checks are largely unmonitored and unregulated.

Public safety and fiscal responsibility demands that we give people with a criminal record a real opportunity to become productive citizens. It is equally important to develop a process that recognizes an individual's process toward that goal by minimizing the effects of past behavior on future success and integration. A person who, because of stigma, cannot find employment or housing, and who isn't afraid of incarceration, is a problem for us all.