

The **ReStart** Program – a Project to Reduce Unnecessary Jail Sentences in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

About Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

County Profile - 2020

- One of the five southeastern Pennsylvania counties that make up the Philadelphia Region.
- **Population: 830,000**, second highest population in the region after the city of Philadelphia (1.5M)
- Second-wealthiest county in Pennsylvania.
Median Household Income: \$90,122
- **Average Daily Prison Population: 1,500 persons**
- **High cost per day for each person incarcerated \$71.43 per day. Costs the county \$107,145 PER DAY to incarcerate 1,500 people. Annually: \$40 million**
- Average Rental Housing Costs – Fair Market Rent (FMR): **\$1,047** for one bedroom. One Year Cost: **\$18 million to house 1,500 former inmates back into the community.**

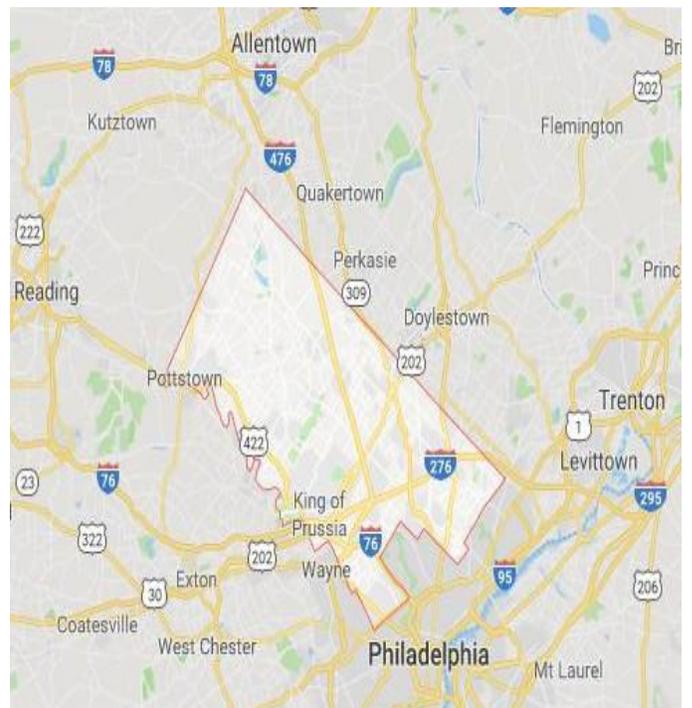


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Context:

The United States has the highest incarceration rate and largest prison population in the world. According to the Prison Policy Initiative, roughly 2.4 million people are incarcerated in the US, with 1.36 million in state prisons, 720,000 in local jails, and 210,000 in federal prisons.¹

The Montgomery County Correctional Facility (MCCF), located in Eagleville Pennsylvania is one of these local jails. During any single day approximately 1558 inmates are incarcerated at this jail. This is above the capacity of 1500 inmates that can be housed at the facility, leading to increased cost and overcrowding.

Overview of the Issue and its Impact:

A 2019 survey of 920 inmates at MCCF found the following results:

- 450 inmates experienced homelessness prior to their incarceration
- 184 inmates, or one-fifth had less than a high school education or GED
- 307, or one-third of the inmates self-reported that they would need assistance finding employment or needed job training after leaving jail
- 475 inmates said they needed public benefits after leaving jail.

For these inmates, finding housing while in jail is incredibly difficult and often impossible. Incarcerated persons experience significant housing barriers due to a variety of factors, including lack of income to pay for initial security deposits or maintain on-going rental payments, poor credit histories, prevalent and documented discrimination by landlords against persons with a criminal history. Additionally, the

¹ <https://fee.org/articles/criminal-justice-reform-is-also-good-economics/> - August 16, 2018

affordable housing market is limited, therefore finding a cost-efficient unit located in a positive social environment, away from the negative influences that contributed to the individual's criminal activity is an on-going challenge. Finally, subsidized housing through the county's Public Housing Authority is not available due to extremely long waiting lists (more than 2 years), and prohibitions based on criminal history.

Release from jail at the time an inmate reaches their minimum sentencing date is often predicated on the approval of a viable housing plan by the county Office of Adult Probation. A viable housing plan means that the inmate can immediately move into an independent living situation or can move into housing with family or friends. Moving into a homeless emergency shelter or living on the streets in a homeless encampment is not an acceptable or viable housing plan. Therefore, inmates with significant housing barriers often reach their minimum sentencing date without an approved housing plan, and consequently continue to reside in jail for months while housing is sought. In fact, as of March 2020, **45** inmates at MCCF have reached their minimum sentencing date and cannot be released due to lack of housing. The **average increased length of stay in jail is 120 days, or just about 4 months**. The average cost per day of incarceration at MCCF is **\$71.43 per inmate**. Therefore, one inmate whose release is delayed due to lack of housing options, costs Montgomery County taxpayers an additional and preventable **\$8,572, or even more starkly, \$385,722 for the 45 inmates** who are currently in jail and have completed their terms but cannot be released due to lack of housing. Additionally, this number is not static and continues to multiply over the years as more people are incarcerated, and their sentences extended due to lack of housing.

As outlined, unnecessary days spent in jail not only have significant cost implications, but also have an impact on the incarcerated individual's mental and physical health. Incarceration also significantly impacts employment prospects for inmates and negatively impacts the inmates' dependent children and family.

Examination of Two Best Practice Reentry Programs in the United States:

A. The City of Philadelphia Office of Reentry Partnerships (ORP):

In 2020, the average daily prison population in the city of Philadelphia was 4,500—about 3 times the number of inmates at the Montgomery County Correctional facility.² Philadelphia has several organizations working on reentry initiatives, led by the Philadelphia Reentry Coalition—a 115-member group focused on reducing the recidivism cycle.

In August 2019, the city launched a new local Office of Reentry Partnerships (ORP), in order to support Mayor Jimmy Kenney's administrations goals for criminal justice reform, violence prevention, and community reinvestment.³ The new office serves as Philadelphia's hub for reentry referrals, resources and training for inmates released from prison. As outlined on their website, the new Office of Reentry Partnerships has three main goals⁴:

² <https://www.phila.gov/media/20200506144620/Full-Public-Jail-Report-March-2020.pdf> accessed March 16, 2021

³ <https://www.phila.gov/departments/office-of-reentry-partnerships/> accessed March 16, 2021

⁴ <https://www.phila.gov/departments/office-of-reentry-partnerships/#:~:text=You%20can%20contact%20ORP%20by,for%20reentry%20support%20by%20phone> accessed March 16, 2021

- To set a clear vision and direction for a measurable citywide approach to improving reentry outcomes.
- Drive and sustain coordination between the local government, other government partners, service providers, education and training programs, employers, and community members.
- Ensure that the city’s reentry initiatives are research- and data-driven.⁵

The new office is currently working in partnership with the Philadelphia Reentry Coalition on a strategic planning process that will assist in clarifying its goals and initiatives for a 2-year period beginning in the fall 2021.⁶ ORP is also focused on connecting resources such as job training programs, mental health services referrals, food and other one-time financial resources to former inmates.⁷

Unlike the ReStart Program in Montgomery County, which starts to work with the prison population while they are still in jail, the new ORP in Philadelphia begins its work with inmates after release from prison. However, what is truly unique about the reentry efforts in Philadelphia, is the fact that the ORP has been established in the first place, and has a fulltime 13-member staff, a director and deputy director. Additionally, ORP is fully funded through the city’s annual operational budget and falls under the jurisdiction of the city’s Managing Director, who reports directly to the

⁵ <https://www.phila.gov/departments/office-of-reentry-partnerships/#:~:text=You%20can%20contact%20ORP%20by,for%20reentry%20support%20by%20phone>. accessed March 16, 2021

⁶ <https://www.philadelphiareentrycoalition.org/home-for-good> accessed April 14, 2021

⁷ <https://www.phila.gov/media/20210405142201/Office-of-Reentry-Partnerships-flyer-English.pdf> accessed April 14, 2021

Mayor. This means that ORP's staff and resources are focused on meeting the needs of reentry inmates, and not on fundraising. Additionally, the formation of ORP points to the commitment of the city to truly addressing criminal justice reform. In Mayor Kenney's opening remarks, reported in the Philadelphia Inquirer on August 19, 2019, the Mayor states: *"This new office represents a renewed commitment by our Administration to take a hard look at what we can do differently to better support the formerly incarcerated. We know that breaking the cycle of recidivism will strengthen neighborhoods, help us decrease our city's pervasive poverty rate, and improve the quality of life for all Philadelphians."*⁸

With the creation of the ORP, reentry efforts in Philadelphia are now centralized and coordinated. The formerly incarcerated in Philadelphia no longer must wade through several scattered programs and organizations to get the assistance and resources they need in order to successfully connect back to the community.

ORP is just about one year now, since its launch in 2019, therefore it will take additional time to assess its impact and success. However, it is evident that Mayor Kenney's administration has prioritized criminal justice reform in Philadelphia and is committed to successful reentry initiatives.

⁸ <https://www.phila.gov/2019-08-19-mayor-announces-creation-of-office-of-reentry-partnerships/> accessed April 30, 2021

B. The Los Angeles California, Office of Diversion and Reentry (ODR):

With an average of 22,000 inmates daily, the Los Angeles California prison system is not only the largest in the United States, but also the world.⁹ Therefore, in order to better meet the needs of these thousands of inmates, especially those with mental health or substance abuse disorders, the county of Los Angeles created the Office of Diversion and Reentry (ODR), in September 2015.

ODR's mission and goals are similar to the recently created Philadelphia Office of Reentry Partnerships, however the Los Angeles ODR also includes a program that provides permanent supportive housing options for inmates upon release, and pretrial defendants with mental disabilities facing criminal felony charges.¹⁰ The program collaborates with the Superior Courts of Los Angeles County, Housing for Health, and Community Based mental health and housing providers. Like the ReStart Program in Montgomery County PA, the Los Angeles program begins to work with inmates while they are still in prison and have no housing options upon release.

The Los Angeles ODR permanent supportive housing program is considered unique and sighted as a best practice because of the housing options it provides to both homeless inmates, and pretrial defendants with mental health and/or substance use disorders. In addition, the ODR program also offers pretrial defendants an opportunity to

⁹ <https://www.aclu.org/issues/prisoners-rights/cruel-inhuman-and-degrading-conditions/la-county-jails#:~:text=Los%20Angeles%20County%20Jails%2C%20with,savage%20deputy%20on%20inmate%20violence>. accessed April 30, 2021

¹⁰ <https://probation.lacounty.gov/office-of-diversion-reentry-housing/> accessed April 30, 2021

actively participate in their treatment and to remain out of custody in order to maintain housing provided by the program. Inmates (referred to as clients), in the ODR housing program are assigned an intensive case management services provider who works with the client as they transition from custody to community. The intensive case management services providers serve as the core point of contact for the client's medical, mental health, substance use disorder treatment, and other supportive services. Permanent supportive housing subsidies, a key component of the program, is provided through the Los Angeles Department of Human Services (DHS), Flexible Housing Subsidy Pool (FHSP).¹¹

The ODR permanent supportive housing program is also fully funded by the Los Angeles county government, and has demonstrated some success in keeping homeless people, especially those with mental health and substance abuse disorders, out of prison in the first place. Sentencing people to jail, especially those with mental health disabilities happens far too often in the United States. According to the Treatment Advocacy Center, at least 20% of the prison population in the United States, has severe mental illness.¹² Therefore, having a permanent supportive housing program like the ODR Los Angeles program, provides a practical solution towards achieving criminal justice reform.

¹¹ <https://probation.lacounty.gov/office-of-diversion-reentry-housing/> accessed May 1, 2021

¹² <https://www.treatmentadvocacycenter.org/evidence-and-research/learn-more-about/3695> accessed May 1, 2021

Proposed Solution for Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

Unlike the two best practice programs described in Philadelphia and Los Angeles, Montgomery County, PA does not have an Office or Department within the county government whose sole mission is focused on reentry and criminal justice reform. Instead, the ReStart Program is organized under the broader Your Way Home (YWH) Montgomery County initiative to end homelessness. YWH's mission is to provide affordable housing solutions for the homeless in the county. However, the ReStart Program most closely aligns with the Los Angeles ODR Permanent Supportive Housing Program.

ReStart in Montgomery County is designed to reduce levels of incarceration and increase positive social outcomes for inmates returning from the Montgomery County Correctional Facility (MCCF). The program targets inmates at MCCF who have reached their minimum sentencing date (due for release) but remain in jail due to lack of housing. ReStart aims to provide the following services:

- Supportive housing through a 12-month rental housing subsidy managed by the Salvation Army Norristown, a not-for-profit religious organization located in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania.
- Creative affordable housing location support to assist inmates connect with landlords and find safe affordable housing units. Housing Location services would also be provided through the Salvation Army Norristown.
- Expungement services to assist inmates erase their records, whenever possible, and facilitate reintegration back into their communities with fewer employment and housing barriers. Expungement services will be provided

through the Montgomery County Public Defender's Office or Legal Aid of South Eastern, Pennsylvania (LASP).

- Intensive case management services to connect the formerly incarcerated participants to employment or provide job training services. Case management services will be provided by Access Services, a not-for-profit organization in Montgomery County that works to provide mental health services to inmates at MCCF.

Overall, ReStart will provide supportive housing and employment services for formerly incarcerated persons who are low income and facing significant barriers. Additionally, ReStart will demonstrate that on-time release from jail to a safe and appropriate housing unit can contribute to positive social outcomes, such as reduced recidivism, improved health of the formerly incarcerated participants due to reintegration back to their communities, and an increased labor boost for local economies as more people are available for work.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, not all services will be immediately available for the inmates coming out of prison. However, the rental housing subsidies and job training services launched in March 2021.

PROGRAM DESIGN

- **Methodology:**

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, ReStart has been launched prior to the completion of adequate research and analysis to determine the long-term feasibility of the program.

The need to de-congest the correctional facility (MCCF), for safety purposes in

response to Covid-19 is the major driving factor towards its early launch. Therefore, in order to mitigate this limitation, the county has decided to roll out ReStart in two phases: An initial 12-month reduced scope pilot phase that will serve just 20 inmates. The results from this initial pilot phase will then inform a second larger iteration of the program to be launched later. The 20 inmates targeted will either have reached their minimum release date or are within 6 months of their release date.

- **Pilot Phase Staffing:**

ReStart has 1.5FTE's (full time equivalents). A fulltime Program Manager whose primary responsibility is to roll out the program and oversee its day-to-day operations, and a part-time Housing Locator who assists ReStart participants find appropriate affordable housing options and assists in the negotiation of rental leases with landlords on behalf of participants.

- **Advisory Team:**

A 15-member Advisory Team consisting of representatives from partner agencies and community experts with "lived experience" who oversee all aspects of the project, provide advice, recommend changes to policies and procedures, as well as oversee the work of the fulltime Program Manager and part-time Housing Locator. The Advisory Team meets monthly and provides guidance and advice to the ReStart Program Manager.

- **Third-Party Independent Evaluation:**

A third-party evaluation of ReStart is planned that will assess the 12-month pilot phase outcomes of the program. The goal of the evaluation is to provide an independent analysis of the program. This evaluation will be key in providing the

achievements of the program, assessing its limitations and providing recommendations that will need to be implemented, in order for the project to move forward, beyond its pilot phase and into a second more permanent phase of the program.

Program Partners:

The following is a list of the ReStart Partnering organizations and affiliations (10 total), as well as their role in the 12-month pilot phase of the program:

PARTNER ORGANIZATION NAME	ROLE IN RESTART
Access Services	Non-profit agency will provide Justice Related Case Management Services (JRS) to inmates, while they are still serving sentences
Legal Aid of Southeastern Pennsylvania (LASP)	Non-profit agency - will provide legal services, landlord/tenant mitigation services, as well as criminal record expungement services
Montgomery County Correctional Facility (MCCF)	Will identify eligible inmate participants for the program
Montgomery County Public Defender’s Office	Will provide public defenders as needed for inmates, and work with ReStart inmate participants to expunge records and provide legal services.
Pennsylvania Career Link	Will provide job search services
Private Foundations	Will provide flexible private funding for ReStart for the program that is not as regulated as government funding.
The Montgomery County Reentry Coalition	The 50-member Reentry Coalition will contribute some of its members to the ReStart Advisory Team
Third-Party Independent Evaluator (TBD)	To-Be-Determined. Will perform independent analysis of the pilot phase of the program and provide recommendations for the second phase of the program
Salvation Army Norristown	Will provide case management and housing location services for the inmates enrolled in ReStart
Your Way Home Montgomery County (YWH)	Will oversee the day-to-day management of ReStart through a full time Program Manager.

Program Budget – YEAR 1 PILOT PHASE

BUDGET LINE ITEMS	ONE YEAR PROPOSED BUDGET	COUNTY FUNDING (Covid-19 Stimulus)	PRIVATE FUNDING (Private Foundations)
Rental Housing Subsidies (12-months) – 1 bedroom at FMR of \$1,047 per unit – 20 housing units for 12-months	\$251,280.00	\$170,000.00	\$81,280.00
Participants Supportive Services (Job Training Programs, Case Management, Legal Services, etc.)	\$150,000.00	\$90,000.00	\$60,000.00
Staffing Costs (1.5FTE's)	\$90,000.00	\$60,000.00	\$30,000.00
Third-Party Evaluation Costs - Estimated	\$30,000.00	\$30,000.00	\$0.00
Landlord Engagement/Incentives @ \$1,000 per landlord*	\$10,000.00	\$0.00	\$10,000.00
TOTAL PROPOSED – ONE YEAR PILOT PHASE	\$531,280.00	\$350,000.00 (65% of Budget)	\$181,280.00 (35% of Budget)

Budget Narrative:

Budget is based on the 12-month pilot phase of ReStart, expected to enroll 20 participants in housing and supportive services. Each inmate, released from prison is expected to be housed in a one-bedroom apartment, at an average Fair Market Rent (FMR) cost of \$1,047 per month for 12-months. Funding for the pilot phase is from 2 sources; the 2020 CARES Act funding passed by congress in response to coronavirus. The county has set aside \$350,000 from its CARES Act funding for ReStart. In addition, 2 foundations have provided \$100,000 in private funding for the pilot phase of the project. Total funding available and committed to the One-Year Pilot Phase is: \$450,000. The project still has an outstanding funding gap of \$81,280 that is expected to be raised from private resources.

Proposed Performance Measures – One Year Pilot Phase:

- Number of Inmates Enrolled in ReStart
- Number of ReStart Inmate Participants Connected to Housing
 - Participants in an apartment – with rental subsidy
 - Length of Time to get into Housing
 - Average Monthly and Annual Cost of Housing
- Number of Participants Connected or Enrolled in Job Training Programs:
 - How many are enrolled in Job Training Programs
 - How many are connected to jobs and earning a paycheck
 - Length of Time to Job Placement
- Reduction in levels of incarceration (data from MCCF):
 - Reduction in days in jail (and cost savings)
 - Reduction in returns to jail
 - Reduction in probation violations
 - Reduction in new charges
- Increase in positive social outcomes
 - Reunification of Participants with dependent children
 - Improved health outcomes
 - Attainment of other supports based on the individual's Housing Stability Plan

Methodology to Collect Performance Measures:

- I. **Formal Third-Party Research and Evaluation by a local or regional university partnership or independent consultant:** The entire program implementation, its budgetary costs, its limitations, staffing structure, policies and procedures and benefits to program participants will be independently evaluated. The results from the evaluation and any lessons learned will then be implemented in future iterations of the program.

- II. **Program participants beneficiary data:** With willing participant consent, all ReStart participant data will be collected and entered into the county's Homeless Management Information Database System (HMIS). The database system is shared across all the partner organizations (except MCCF), therefore ReStart participant demographic data, household information, case management services received by the participants (including job training and placement, etc), will be entered and tracked in the HMIS database system.

- III. **ReStart Participant Interviews:** Participants will be interviewed (with consent, and as willing), on their experiences with ReStart.

- IV. **Data from MCCF on Inmates Enrolled in ReStart:**

MCCF will share relevant data on incarceration rates, including recidivism and other relevant data as needed, with the ReStart Program Manager.

The pilot phase data collected will be measured against the outlined performance measures and shared with the Advisory Team and Third-party evaluator on a monthly basis. At the end of the 12-month pilot phase, the Third-Party evaluator will compile a report and share comprehensive findings of the pilot project.

Conclusion:

There are a myriad of benefits for the formerly incarcerated participants in ReStart and a potential economic labor boost for businesses and/or other enterprises in the county looking for people to hire, especially as the county attempts to emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Both transformative and transactional leadership from the county are necessary in order to make this program continue beyond its one-year pilot phase. Transformative, because it requires a big shift in the way things are currently done, a shift from the status quo. Transactional leadership is also required from directors and managers at partner agencies in order to fully execute and implement the program. Ultimately, it would be a win for all partner

agencies involved and program participants. The jail would get to release inmates on time and reduce overcrowding, while saving money; the elected officials would get to tout criminal justice reform in the county, without raising taxes, and finally and most importantly, the formerly incarcerated would be reunited with their families, regain housing and employment and possibly even have their criminal records expunged.

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