



# **SOLUTIONS, INITIATIVES, STRATEGIES TO REDUCE THE INCARCERATION OF OKLAHOMA WOMEN**

## **A PUBLIC AGENDA ACTION PLAN**

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**Strategies to Lower the Incarceration Rate  
of Women in Oklahoma  
to Under the National Average by 2020**

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## OKLAHOMA Solutions Initiatives Strategies

The "**Reduce Incarceration of Women: A Public Agenda Action Plan**" is a collaborative, non-partisan statewide initiative of action strategies to reduce the incarceration rate of women in Oklahoma *to less than the national average by 2020* using evidence-based practices and policies.

Oklahoma has ranked first in the incarceration rate of women per capita, above all other states in the nation, for much of the past two decades.

The Oklahoma SIS: Solutions, Initiatives, Strategies project, spearheaded by the Oklahoma Commission on the Status of Women, the Oklahoma Department of Corrections, and the Oklahoma Women's Coalition seeks the assistance of all Oklahomans to reduce the rate of non-violent, low-risk women offenders while enhancing public safety and expanding cost efficiencies.

We offer this plan of action for your review, endorsement and collective action. Four clearly-stated overarching strategies, followed by state, community and individual strategic action goals with suggested approaches across the life-long path of incarceration -- **Prevention - Intervention & Diversion - Recidivism & Reentry** -- provide many opportunities for individuals, civic, community, faith-based, judicial, legislative and governmental interests to step up and effect change.

### STATE, COMMUNITY & INDIVIDUAL ACTION

In every strategic life span area, a few simply-stated strategies set out actions to accomplish at both state and community levels as well as actions individuals may choose to select. "The "suggested approaches" are activities any group or individual may elect to undertake to help achieve one or more strategies, but are indeed simply "suggested" deliberately making room for a host of other approaches and activities.

### BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE ON INCARCERATION OF WOMEN

The Oklahoma SIS project brought together a 42-member panel of experts and leaders in the field of women's incarceration in Oklahoma. Panelists reviewed and distilled years of recommendations and research into a comprehensive plan of action for addressing the highest incarceration rate of women in the nation. As part of the year-long project, a diverse group of some 200 state leaders, individuals, governmental and non-governmental entities adopted the plan at an issues summit April 30, 2010.

### FOUR OVERARCHING STRATEGIES

Over-Arching Strategies concisely identify four key actions critical to achieving the overall goal: to reduce the incarceration rate of Oklahoma women to under the national average by 2020 using evidence-based practice and policy.

1. Interrupt the pathways to incarceration.
2. Expand critical services to at-risk individuals, populations and communities.
3. Enhance public safety while implementing/expanding lower cost alternatives to incarceration for nonviolent female offenders.
4. Remove barriers and provide support for successful return from incarceration to society.

## CALLING OKLAHOMANS TO ACTION

### STRATEGIC CHANGE ACROSS LIFE SPAN

Comprehensively, the Reduce Incarceration of Women Action Plan approaches the issues surrounding women's incarceration across the span of an individual's lifetime. This approach asks, "To effectively reduce women's incarceration numbers at the lowest risk to public safety and at the most efficient cost to taxpayers, at what critical points in life can the greatest numbers of lives be redirected away from paths leading to imprisonment and restored to society?"

In response, the Oklahoma SIS Reduce Incarceration of Women Action Plan divides the life span of incarceration into three broad areas, identifying strategies for change in each at the state, community and individual local levels. Strategic life span change areas are: 1) Prevention; 2) Intervention & Diversion; 3) Recidivism & Reentry.

**Prevention:** Strategies to reduce common pathways and factors that can contribute to later incarceration.

**Intervention and Diversion:** Strategies to intervene and address risk factors both before and after contact with law enforcement and/or strategies to divert low-risk nonviolent offenders from incarceration.

**Recidivism and Reentry:** Strategies that support rehabilitation of offenders, reduce recidivism and enable offenders to successfully reenter the community after imprisonment.

Strategic areas are listed in order of their ultimate potential to have the greatest impact on reducing incarceration rate numbers at more efficient costs than the \$20,000-plus annual cost of incarceration per woman using evidence-based practices and policies.

# PREVENTION

Overarching Strategy:  
Interrupt the pathways to incarceration.

## State

- ▶ Reduce adverse childhood experiences through evidence-based programs that address physical, sexual and emotional abuse; emotional or physical neglect; untreated mental illness or addiction in the home; incarceration of a family member; domestic violence; and single parenting.
- ▶ Implement and enhance evidence-based, comprehensive and well-coordinated services for women and children (0-18 years) who have factors shown to put them at high risk for later incarceration.

*Suggested approaches include:*

- ▶ Encourage coordination of services among faith-based and community-based organizations.
- ▶ Encourage communication among government entities.
- ▶ Educate key audiences on availability of services and programs.
- ▶ Support creation of the Children of Incarcerated Parents Advisory Council for the purpose of gathering data, identifying interagency collaborations and creating a state plan to address the needs of families affected by incarceration.
- ▶ Support initiatives that:
  - ▶ Provide funding for assessments of children whose mothers are going to prison and at regular intervals during incarceration.
  - ▶ Provide funding for programs for children whose mothers are incarcerated.
  - ▶ Continue funding of programs that address issues of parenting and child abuse prevention.
  - ▶ Examine issues related to guardianship and custody to ensure caregivers have access to needed services.
  - ▶ Remove barriers that hinder examination of family situations prior to sentencing, including movement of Title 22, Chapter 1, Section 20 (Imprisonment of a Single Custodial Parent of Minor Child—Care and Custody of the Child) from criminal procedure to sentencing statutes.
  - ▶ Require Oklahoma institutions of higher education to provide training for teachers on identification and referral of at-risk children.
  - ▶ Increase affordable childcare programs for at-risk women who are pursuing further education.

## Community

(Including Businesses, Faith-Based Organizations and Community-Based Organizations, County and Local Governments, etc.)

- ▶ Enhance domestic violence services.

*Suggested approaches include:*

- ▶ Encourage vigorous investigation and prosecution, even when the victim becomes reluctant to testify or file charges.
- ▶ Expand programs to educate, protect and empower victims.
- ▶ Increase programs that identify and provide services to children in these homes.

- ▶ Encourage collaborations that expand evidence-based school programs for children and youth. Suggested approaches include:

- ▶ Prevent bullying.
- ▶ Teen pregnancy prevention.
- ▶ Prevent dating/ domestic violence.
- ▶ Prevent suicide.
- ▶ Prevent substance abuse and addiction.
- ▶ Reduce truancy and increase graduation rates through counseling and mentoring.
- ▶ Expand existing mediation programs.
- ▶ Facilitate identification and referral of at-risk children.
- ▶ Establish safe havens through after-school programs
- ▶ Expand early childhood education programs.
- ▶ Increase engagement of caregivers/ family members.
- ▶ Increase self esteem and self worth for girls.



## Individual

- ▶ Educate, advocate and volunteer.

*Suggested approaches include:*

- ▶ Volunteer to tutor at a school.
- ▶ Volunteer with a scouting organization.
- ▶ Volunteer with a faith-based organization's youth group.
- ▶ Join a civic club with an interest in youth.
- ▶ Join a group that is interested in mentoring young girls and teens.
- ▶ Volunteer with an after school program.
- ▶ Volunteer with the local Literacy Council.
- ▶ Volunteer to be a Big Brother or Big Sister.
- ▶ Assist the local library with reading hour.
- ▶ Raise funds for child abuse prevention.
- ▶ Mentor an "at-risk" child.
- ▶ Volunteer with a safety-net organization that makes referrals and assists with health/ social services.

# INTERVENTION & DIVERSION

## Overarching Strategies:

Expand critical services to at-risk individuals, populations and communities.

Enhance public safety while implementing/ expanding lower cost alternatives to incarceration for nonviolent female offenders.

*Note: A number of the Intervention and Diversion strategies are incorporated in Oklahoma's Smart on Crime initiative.*

### State

- ▶ Undertake a comprehensive evaluation of the Oklahoma criminal justice system (arrest through reentry) to identify opportunities to reduce spending, increase public safety, and improve conditions in communities and neighborhoods most affected by incarceration.
- ▶ Expand the availability of mental health, substance abuse and domestic violence services throughout the state.
- ▶ Expand mental health and substance abuse treatment availability for persons entering the criminal justice system.

#### *Suggested approaches include:*

- ▶ Train police responders in every community to identify substance abuse and mental health symptoms.
- ▶ Establish a system of psychiatric/ addiction responders throughout the state to respond to the scene to help divert individuals.
- ▶ Support evidence-based alternatives to prison for nonviolent female offenders.

#### *Suggested approaches include:*

- ▶ Support legislation that authorizes a pilot program and provides support for alternative and reentry programs for female offenders.
- ▶ Expand mental health court, drug court, juvenile court, veterans' court and community sentencing programs.
- ▶ Implement standardized mental health and addiction screening in county jails to facilitate appropriate treatment and diversion.
- ▶ Remove barriers that prevent suitable offenders from entering mental health court, drug court, juvenile court, veterans' court and community sentencing.
- ▶ Require program evaluations to include consistent implementation, adherence to best practices, outcomes and opportunities to modify target population.
- ▶ Monitor use of alternatives to incarceration to ensure they are not being used in lieu of local options.
- ▶ Evaluate whether citation in lieu of arrest can be expanded.

- ▶ Support legislation and statute changes that will reduce incarceration of low risk, nonviolent female offenders.

#### *Suggested approaches include:*

- ▶ Establish the default sentence sequence as concurrent rather than consecutive.
- ▶ Repeal the prohibition against probation sentences for nonviolent offenses.
- ▶ Enact presumptive probation sentences for drug possession crimes.
- ▶ Eliminate mandatory minimum prison sentences for drug possession and nonviolent felonies, except for provisions of the Habitual Offender Act.
- ▶ Standardize the penalty for equal quantities of crack and powder cocaine.
- ▶ Change marijuana possession of one ounce or less to a misdemeanor subject to fines, community service, mandatory treatment and jail.
- ▶ Institute and provide funding for mandatory treatment for drug offenders.
- ▶ Repeal the statutory prohibition against suspended sentences for certain offenses, allowing courts to use community supervision programs as alternative to prison.
- ▶ Enhance programs and services for juveniles within the Office of Juvenile Affairs (OJA) system to reduce risk of incarceration.

### Community (Including Businesses, Faith-Based Organizations and Community-Based Organizations, County and Local Governments, etc.)

- ▶ Support education programs for judges, district attorneys, prosecutors and law enforcement regarding alternatives to incarceration and services.
- ▶ Expand evidence-based detoxification and treatment programs police can utilize for offenders arrested on possession of drugs/ alcohol.
- ▶ Enhance and support initiatives that identify and assist at-risk women.

### Individual

- ▶ Educate, advocate and volunteer.

#### *Suggested approaches include:*

- ▶ Volunteer with the local mental health or substance abuse advocacy/ treatment/ support group.
- ▶ Work with businesses to gain employment for offenders.
- ▶ Educate those in your family, neighborhood, faith-based organization, social circle or professional circle about intervention and redirection.
- ▶ Raise funds for organizations that serve "at-risk" populations.
- ▶ Work with faith-based organizations in drug, mental health or credit counseling programs.
- ▶ Mentor a young woman who is at risk of incarceration.
- ▶ Volunteer with a nonprofit credit/ financial counseling service.



# RECIDIVISM & REENTRY

## Overarching Strategy:

Remove barriers and provide support for successful return from incarceration to society.

*Note: A number of the Reentry and Recidivism strategies are incorporated in Oklahoma's Smart on Crime initiative.*

## State

- ▶ Maximize coordination, communication and utilization of services among government entities, businesses, faith-based organizations and community-based organizations.

*Suggested approaches include:*

- ▶ Develop, maintain and/or enhance a central, easily accessible source of available services and resources.
- ▶ Increase awareness of availability and use of evidence-based services and programs.
- ▶ Support legislation and statute revisions that remove barriers and provide support for successful return from incarceration to society.



*Suggested approaches include:*

- ▶ Increase the proportion of offenders released under supervision.
- ▶ Deem paroles approved, with the exception of "85 percent" crimes, if no action is taken by Governor in 30 days.
- ▶ Remove common reentry barriers:
  - ▶ Reinstate civil rights for nonviolent offenders 5 to 7 years after the expiration of all sentences.
  - ▶ Establish state tax incentives for landlords who provide access to housing to ex-offenders.
  - ▶ Establish state tax incentives for employers who hire offenders.
  - ▶ Support pilot programs for alternatives to incarceration and reentry programs.
  - ▶ Establish a statewide strategy for payment of fines, fees, restitution and reinstatement of drivers licenses post-release.

- ▶ Establish post-conviction reviews for eligible offenders.
- ▶ Allow judges to modify sentences at reviews.
- ▶ Establish mechanisms to inform courts about offenders who may benefit from release within the first year of their sentences.
- ▶ Remove automatic exclusions from professional licenses based on felony convictions.

- ▶ Maintain and expand evidence-based reentry programs and services.
  - ▶ Enhance continuity of care for offenders with mental health and substance abuse issues.
  - ▶ Expand treatment capacity for offenders being discharged (discharge specialists, intensive care coordination teams, forensic PACT teams).
  - ▶ Expand treatment capacity for individuals on probation/parole.
- ▶ Enhance substance abuse treatment programs provided in prisons and after release.
- ▶ Enhance job readiness and employment:
  - ▶ Increase job skills and placement services.
  - ▶ Maintain/expand college-level coursework, vocational training and General Equivalency Diploma (GED) in the prisons through higher education and career tech programs.
  - ▶ Offer incentives to faculty who teach these programs in prisons.
  - ▶ Review admission policies to remove barriers for ex-offenders, including entry restrictions, financial aid restrictions, etc.
- ▶ Expand awareness of federal tax credits for businesses that employ ex-offenders.
- ▶ Encourage state agencies to employ offenders before they are released.
- ▶ Explore opportunities to provide certificates of employability for offenders who are qualified to perform productively in the workplace.
- ▶ Explore opportunities for offenders to complete community service requirements before they are released.
- ▶ Enhance Life Skills.
  - ▶ Support programs that improve the quality of parent-child interactions during visitation.
  - ▶ Support increased opportunities for incarcerated mothers to enhance parenting skills.
  - ▶ Provide family counseling for mothers and children.
  - ▶ Provide skill-building opportunities in money management.

# RECIDIVISM & REENTRY

Continued

## Community

(Including Businesses, Faith-Based Organizations and Community-Based Organizations, County and Local Governments, etc.)

- ▶ Increase awareness of and support for female offenders reentering the community.

*Suggested approaches include:*

- ▶ Educate stakeholders (e.g., business owners/leaders, faith-based and community organizations) about female offenders and how they can get involved.
  - ▶ Ensure mental health and health care providers are prepared to serve returning offenders.
  - ▶ Expand housing opportunities.
  - ▶ Increase employment opportunities.
  - ▶ Educate employers and employment agencies about female offenders and incentives for hiring ex-offenders.
  - ▶ Encourage employers to remove blanket “no felony” policies.
  - ▶ Expand opportunities for ex-offenders in need of education (i.e., literacy, adult basic education, general equivalency diploma, college) and job skills.
  - ▶ Expand mentoring programs for ex-offenders.
- ▶ Increase evidence-based programs for children and their incarcerated mothers that begin during incarceration and bridge to the community post-incarceration.

*Suggested approaches include:*

- ▶ Increase networks of support for children and their caregivers.
- ▶ Increase and support visitation programs and transportation for children to enhance relationships while mothers are incarcerated.
- ▶ Expand/support mentoring programs to assist with completing college applications and financial aid forms, testing, studying, etc.
- ▶ Encourage and support increased involvement from faith-based organizations and support faith-based transition programs.

## Individual

- ▶ Educate, advocate and volunteer.

*Suggested approaches include:*

- ▶ Tutor a reentering woman who is working toward her GED.
- ▶ Support nonprofits that provide safe housing for women offenders returning to the community.

- ▶ Start a child care program in your faith-based organization for children of formerly incarcerated moms.
- ▶ Donate bus passes to organizations that serve reentering women offenders.
- ▶ Volunteer/raise funds for faith-based groups working in prison ministry.
- ▶ Volunteer/raise funds for nonprofit organizations with a prison program.
- ▶ Volunteer with local nonprofits to assist women who have been incarcerated with the necessities for reentry.
- ▶ Encourage businesses to employ woman offenders with appropriate skills/knowledge returning to the community.

## RESOURCES

For more information, studies and resource lists regarding the incarceration of women in Oklahoma, go to the Oklahoma SIS Website: [www.oklahomasis.com](http://www.oklahomasis.com)



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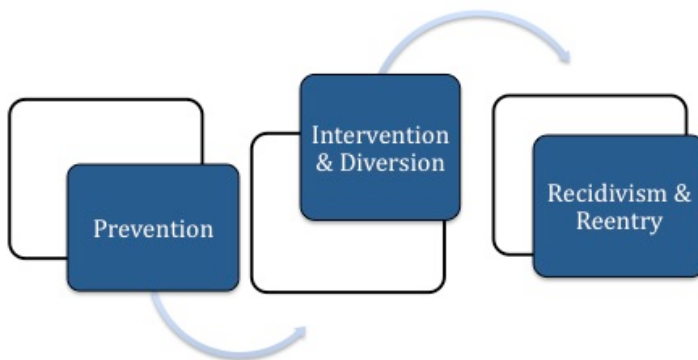
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## SUMMIT SPONSORS



## THE WORK CONTINUES...



The strategies that can effectively lower Oklahoma's high rates of incarceration fall within this spectrum.

**Your help is needed.**

For more information about ongoing efforts to reduce the incarceration rate of women and how you can get involved, please visit [www.oklahomasis.com](http://www.oklahomasis.com).

Prepared by staff of Oklahoma Commission on the Status of Women, Oklahoma Department of Corrections and the Oklahoma Women's Coalition. Oklahoma City, OK, August 2010.