Dear Friends,

We are excited to publish the second edition of the NC Second Chance Alliance Bulletin, an e-newsletter that provides updates on the Second Chance Alliance, a growing statewide alliance of advocacy organizations, service providers, faith-based organizations, community leaders, and interested citizens that have come together to achieve the safe and successful reintegration of adults and juveniles returning home from incarceration by promoting policies that remove barriers to productive citizenship.

Below you will find information on recent policy victories at the NC General Assembly, grassroots efforts to pass Ban the Box, an introduction to the latest member of our team, and Legal Aid’s renewed focus on reentry. Also, we are beginning regular features spotlighting membership organizations and the reentry experiences of individuals with criminal convictions.

In the future, we will be looking for updates from you—what’s happening in your communities and with your organizations to break down barriers facing those with criminal records? Pass along updates to us by emailing danielb@ncjustice.org and we’ll include them in future newsletters. And, help us grow the list of friends that receive the NC Second Chance Alliance Bulletin. Forward this newsletter to your friends and ask them to sign up for future newsletters by clicking here.

UPDATE: Please see below for the updated Ban the Box communities section. The Durham victory was missing from the first version of the newsletter.

Second Chance Lobby Day Helps Secure Legislative Victories

With a collective cry of “I’m for Second Chances,” over 200 individuals with criminal records and "second chance" supporters made the inaugural Second Chance Lobby Day at the North Carolina General Assembly a resonating success. The April 26th event was the result of much hard work by many Second Chance Alliance members, but special recognition must be given to Dennis Gaddy and the staff at Community Success Initiative for their efforts in organizing the day. Members of the General Assembly were encouraged to support various bills targeted at reducing the barriers to reentry that confront individuals with criminal conviction. For videos of the Second Chance Lobby Day press conference, please visit here: Second Chance Lobby Day Video.

The energy and imagery provided by those many members of the Second Chance Alliance who attended and spoke out proved to be instrumental in several legislative victories that occurred later in the legislative session. Highlighted here are three notable legislative changes: establishment of Certificates of Relief, expansion of expunctions to first-time non-violent felonies committed by those under 18, and passage of the Justice Reinvestment Act.
These policy changes are important steps forward in our work to provide relief from criminal convictions.

Certificates of Relief
Beginning December 1, 2011, individuals with certain criminal convictions may apply for a “Certificate of Relief” from collateral consequences. The certificate is especially valuable for individuals automatically barred from certain occupational licensures based on their criminal convictions. Obtaining a certificate of relief overcomes such automatic bars; as importantly, a certificate of relief is considered favorably in situations where occupational licensing agencies are allowed the discretion to deny a license based on a criminal conviction. A certificate of relief does not result in an expunction or pardon of the conviction.

The basic requirements of gaining the certificate are as follows:

- the person must have been convicted of no more than two Class G, H, or I felonies or misdemeanors in one session of court and have no other convictions,
- twelve months have passed since the person completed his or her sentence,
- the person is engaged in or is seeking to engage in a lawful occupation or activity,
- the person has no criminal charges pending,
- the person has complied with all requirements of the person’s sentence,
- granting the petition would not pose an unreasonable risk to the safety or welfare of the public

For more information visit here: Session Law 2011-265

Expunction of Non-Violent Felonies under 18
An individual who had no prior criminal conviction and committed a nonviolent felony before the age of 18 may petition for expunction of the nonviolent felony from the person’s criminal record.

To be eligible for expunction:
- at least 4 years must have passed since the date of the conviction or the completion of any active sentence, period of probation, or post-release supervision, whichever is later;
- 100 hours of community service must have been performed by the individual.

For more information visit here: Session Law 2011-278

Justice Reinvestment Act
The Justice Reinvestment Act makes significant changes to North Carolina’s sentencing law and policy with the goal of reducing admissions to prison and promoting more effective use of community resources for dealing with offenders. Specifically, the Act:

- Expands post-release supervision to all felons;
- Expands the authority delegated to probation officers, including authority to impose jail stints;
- Expands those eligible for deferred prosecution program for first time drug possession;
- Creates a new program within DOC (“Advanced Supervised Release” (ASR)) to allow those with D-H class convictions to reduce their sentence by completing a rehabilitation program;
- Requires DOC to assess each person placed on probation for their risk of reoffending by an objective risk assessment;
- Each person’s supervision level should be determined by objective risk assessment, rather than sentencing level;
- Caps the time that could be served on a revocation for strictly technical violations at up to 90 days;
- Adds a new “habitual breaking and entering status offense;”
Requires people with misdemeanor convictions serve their time in jail.

We applaud most of these reforms as positively impacting reentry efforts. Further work certainly remains to find the resources that are required to meet the service needs of those trying to reintegrate into our communities. For a detailed summary and discussion of the Justice Reinvestment Act, visit here: UNC School of Gov, Justice Reinvestment and Session Law 2011-192

Communities Ban the Box

Durham County
The Durham Second Chance Alliance has successfully pressured both the City and County of Durham to remove questions about criminal record history from the initial employment process. The Alliance continues to work with the City and the County to ensure that both entities adopt policies with robust procedural protections which will make certain that people with criminal records have a level playing field when seeking employment.

Click here to watch interviews with Durham residents who have been an integral part of the Ban the Box movement.

Cumberland County
Commissioners of Cumberland County adopted in September 2011 an ordinance disallowing applicants for Cumberland County jobs be asked about their criminal histories in the initial job application. Instead, job applicants will be asked about criminal histories during the interview state of the employment application procedure, at which time they will be able to provide context to the conviction. The ban the box effort was led by Commissioner Charles Evans, himself an individual with a criminal history.
Additional Information:
Cumberland County drops criminal conviction check box on applications
Cumberland County Commissioner Charles Evans biography

Equal Justice Works Sponsors NC Justice Center’s Collateral Consequences Project
Equal Justice Works awarded fellowship funding to support the reentry efforts of the NC Justice Center through 2013. Daniel Bowes joined the Justice Center in September as a staff attorney and will lead, along with General Counsel Bill Rowe, the Center’s efforts on collateral consequences and reentry. Daniel is a graduate of the New York University School of Law. As a staff attorney and Equal Justice Works Fellow, Daniel will confront the collateral consequences of criminal convictions through legal representation of individuals facing barriers to employment, education of lawyers regarding the collateral consequences of criminal convictions, and legislative advocacy.

Daniel’s commitment to this project is deeply personal. Growing up in Alamance County, North Carolina as the child of individuals with criminal convictions, he describes seeing firsthand the persistent barriers to employment and housing his parents faced years after serving their sentences. More importantly, he says, these experiences provided an opportunity to witness his parents’ perseverance, to appreciate the strength and determination that many individuals with criminal convictions possess.

LEGAL AID LAUNCHES AMBASSADORS PROGRAM, EDUCATES LAWYERS ON COLLATERAL CONSEQUENCES
In response to the victories of this past legislative section, Legal Aid of North Carolina has reinvigorated its focus on the collateral consequences of criminal convictions. A committee was tasked with re-examining Legal Aid’s re-entry work on a statewide basis and providing recommendations for a more targeted and robust effort. Already acting on two of these recommendations, Legal Aid has launched the Ambassadors Program at three area law schools and will soon host a Continuing Legal Education event for lawyers focused on the collateral consequences of criminal convictions on October 28. Forty law students from North Carolina Central University, Duke University, and the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill currently serve as Legal Aid Ambassadors. As Legal Aid Ambassadors, first-, second-, and third-year law students will conduct intake interviews on behalf of Legal Aid. On September 9 and 16, 2011, students received training and certification in custody/child support, public benefits, and certificates of relief/expunctions. Much of the program focused either directly or indirectly on the impact of criminal convictions on family, housing, and employment.

We would like to highlight the efforts of The Center for Community Transitions, a longtime member of the Second Chance Alliance. Serving Mecklenburg County, The Center for Community Transitions offers a continuum of services to individuals with criminal convictions, focusing on successful reentry upon release from incarceration and continuing long-term with post-employment job and family counseling. The Center’s continuum of services is built on three programs: LifeWorks!, Families Doing Time, and the ECO Center for Women.

The LifeWorks! program offers employment readiness workshops, job leads, one-on-one case management, referrals to community partners, life skills/critical thinking, and career development and job retention.

Families Doing Time specifically addresses family incarceration issues lessening the negative impact on the family and preparing for a better reentry for the incarcerated family member. Initiatives within the program include mentoring for children of incarcerated parents (in collaboration with Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Mecklenburg County), comprehensive parenting programming in Mecklenburg County jails, and a publication provided for incarcerated parents offering practical information on maintaining relationships with children while incarcerated. Through Families Doing Time’s Family Reunification Assistance initiative inmates are prepared for full-time parenthood upon release through
coaching on school, medical and therapy meetings regarding their children, preparation for difficult discussions with the child’s caregiver or other parents, and training in child discipline and development.

The ECO Center for Women, a 20-bed work release facility for female offenders within 3 years of a release date, provides residents with programs for work release, family leave, community volunteer passes, and study release. Staff at the facility and in other parts of The Center for Community Transitions work with each resident to provide them with tools and experience that will assist them in their transition from prison to the community including individualized employment plans, community employment, education and vocational training, life skills workshops, and family reunification assistance.

To learn more about the wonderful work of the Center for Community Transitions please visit their website at The Center for Community Transitions.

**FACES OF REENTRY**

*Lynn Burke is a graduate of NCCU School of Law. She is the proud mother of 4 college graduates. In 1987, she was convicted of several non-violent felonies and was imprisoned for 22 months. The following is an excerpt from her speech to members of the General Assembly as part of Second Chance Lobby Day.*

“Even after I had my juris doctorate, after I graduated last summer and I was studying for the Bar, I had to find a part-time job. I went to Food Lion and a couple of other places, I never got a call. I have a doctorate and I wasn’t qualified to bag groceries because I have a felony on my record. So I just want to let you know that it’s very important that we help these people get their lives back together. We want to pay taxes, we want to take care of our children, we want to make sure that they don’t go through what we went through, don’t make the bad choices we made.“

Additional Info: Lynn Burke's story and Burke speech, Second Chance Lobby Day

**ONLINE RESOURCES**

Developed by the Carolina Justice Policy Center, the North Carolina Criminal Justice Resource Directory for Practitioners, Offenders and Their Families is intended as a compass to help navigate North Carolina’s network of community-based corrections programs, alternative programs to incarceration, re-entry programs, legal assistance programs and other programs. The directory is organized alphabetically by county and can be found here:


CSI, a leader within the Second Chance Alliance, provides links to several state and national reentry resources and information as part of its “Resource Center Without Walls.”

National Reentry Resources and Resource Center Without Walls

Please regularly visit the Second Chance Alliance’s homepage, hosted by the NC Justice Center, for reentry updates and information. NC Second Chance Alliance Homepage

Remember, share this newsletter with your friends and let us know about any events, best-practices, or highlights from your work by contacting us at danielb@ncjustice.org.

Many thanks,
Your NC Second Chance Alliance team