

Nov. 27, 2017

Governor Charlie Baker
Massachusetts State House
Room 280
Boston, MA 02133

Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito
Massachusetts State House
Room 280
Boston, MA 02133

Senate President Stanley Rosenberg
Massachusetts State House
Room 332
Boston, MA 02133

House Speaker Robert DeLeo
Massachusetts State House
Room 356
Boston, MA 02133

Chief Justice Ralph Gants
Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court
1 Pemberton Square
Boston, MA 02108

RE: Preserving community-based reentry services at Brooke House

Dear Governor Baker, Lieutenant Governor Polito, Senate President Rosenberg, House Speaker DeLeo, and Supreme Judicial Court Chief Justice Gants:

As direct providers of housing, education, vocational training, addiction services, and mental health counseling, and other services for individuals returning to the community after incarceration, and as Boston community members who care about returning citizens, we urge you to support the Brooke House, a pre-release center in Boston's Fenway neighborhood that's helped thousands of men build stable, productive lives.

For more than 50 years, Brooke House, operated by Community Resources for Justice, has connected men in jail or prison with the building blocks to reenter the community as productive citizens and break the cycle of poverty, arrest, and incarceration by providing intensive case management to link these individuals with the myriad of services community partners like us provide. But now, a lack of funding has put this 65-bed facility in danger of closing, the latest in a growing list of reentry programs that have either closed or been scaled back.

The damage caused by this program closing its doors would be apparent almost immediately, but the full devastating impact would ripple out over years. In the short term, some of our services, particularly those serving homeless individuals, would be overburdened by an influx of men who would have previously been served by Brooke House.

Men who would have spent the final months of their sentences at Brooke building the foundation for a new life after their release will instead finish their sentence in a state prison or county house of correction. When they walk through the gates and out into the community, many of them will have no valid state identification, stable family connections, or a safe place to sleep that night. Some will have little or no work history and few skills. Those who had been receiving counseling for substance use inside a prison or jail will face a hard stop, putting them at 120 times the risk of dying from an overdose than someone who's never been incarcerated.

Over time, we have no doubt that we will see recidivism rates climb as individuals left without a direct link to services and support programs fall back into old ways and wind up back in the justice system either for violation the terms of their parole or probation, or because they've been charged with a new crime.

It's true that organizations like ours will continue to provide services to previously incarcerated individuals. But we count on our partners at programs like Brooke to steer individuals to our door. Navigating the web of available services would be daunting for most of us, but for someone with limited resources who left a jail cell in the morning with no idea where he will get his next meal, earn his next paycheck, or even where he will sleep that night is overwhelming if not impossible.

The impact Brooke House has had on the men who've lived there – and the City of Boston – is clear:

- Over the past five years, more than **1,100 men received services** at Brooke House.
- From March through August of this year, **85 percent** of Brooke House residents completed the program and **93 percent** moved on to safe and stable housing.
- In August of this year, **90 percent** of Brooke House residents were employed.
- In a 2017 survey, **100 percent** of residents said being in the program has made them feel they are better able to handle responsibility and are prepared to move back into the community.
- Brooke House received a **perfect score** on its 2017 accreditation by the American Correctional Association.
- Spending part of a sentence in a halfway house reduces recidivism by **up to 20 percent** for individuals assessed as have a high risk of re-offending.

Allowing programs like Brooke House to close doesn't just hurt previously incarcerated individuals. It also hurts other service providers by stretching already thin resources, and the community as a whole by taking away services shown to reduce recidivism.

We believe it is ineffective and wasteful to spend over a billion dollars on corrections without supporting a reentry infrastructure. Especially in light of the criminal justice reform legislation pending at the State House, and in line with the goals of protecting public safety and supporting some of our most challenging individuals, we urge you to help provide adequate funding to keep Brooke House open.

Sincerely,

Whittier Street Health Center

Pine Street Inn

Project Place

Dorchester Bay Economic Development

Haley House

Massachusetts Communities Action Network

Jewish Vocational Service (JVS)

New England Center for Arts and Technology (NECAT)

Strategy Matters, LLC

Lyn Levy, founder of Span, Inc.

Caribbean Integration Community Development

Ex-Prisoners Organizing for Community Advancement (EPOCA)

Cc:

Boston Mayor Martin Walsh

Boston City Councilors Baker, Campbell, Ciommo, Essaibi-George, Flaherty, Jackson, LaMattina, Linehan, McCarthy, O'Malley, Pressley, Wu, and Zakim

State Senators Boncore, Brownsberger, Chang-Diaz, DiDomenico, Dorcena-Forry, and Rush

State Representatives Carvalho, Collins, Coppinger, Cullinane, Holmes, Honan, Hunt, Livingstone, Madaro, Malia, Michlewitz, Moran, Rushing, Ryan, Sanchez, Scaccia, and Tyler

Suffolk County Sheriff Steven Tompkins