

ASSEMBLY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR
ASSEMBLY, No. 844

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: AUGUST 24, 2020

The Assembly Community Development and Affairs Committee reports favorably an Assembly Committee Substitute for Assembly, No. 844.

This committee substitute requires each county to appoint a county reentry coordinator to evaluate needs of county inmates and provide assistance in accessing services.

Under the committee substitute, the governing body of each county is to appoint a county reentry coordinator, who is required to evaluate each inmate in a county correctional facility who has been sentenced to a term of incarceration or ordered detained pending trial following a pretrial detention hearing.

The evaluation required under the substitute bill is to be conducted in conjunction with the clinical screening of inmates as part of the initial classification process. The purpose of the evaluation is to: (1) identify which social services and reentry and rehabilitative programs would benefit the inmate including, but not limited to, the WorkFirst NJ Substance Abuse Initiative; (2) determine whether the inmate is eligible to apply for federal, State, and county public assistance program benefits including, but not limited to, State and federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits, Medicaid, and housing assistance program benefits; (3) determine whether the inmate would benefit from substance use disorder treatment including, but not limited to, medication-assisted treatment; and (4) identify other appropriate treatment, services, and programs which would benefit the inmate.

The county reentry coordinator is required to offer assistance to the inmate in accessing any treatment, services, and programming deemed appropriate for the inmate, based on the evaluation conducted under the bill. This assistance is to include, but not be limited to, assisting the inmate in completing applications for benefits, scheduling appointments, and providing relevant information.

Under the substitute bill, the county reentry coordinator also is required to provide assistance to each inmate, upon release from a county correctional facility, with obtaining a non-driver identification card; and ensuring, to the best of the coordinator's ability, and

conditioned on discharge information provided by the Administrative Office of the Courts, that each inmate is released from custody during regular business hours so that the inmate may access appropriate treatment and services immediately upon release.

Each county reentry coordinator is required under the substitute bill to record data regarding: the number of inmates who are offered services under the bill; the number of inmates who accept the services offered; the types of services provided to each inmate who accepts the services offered; the race, gender, ethnicity, and age of each inmate; a record of any crimes committed by inmates who are released from the facility and the types of crimes committed for a period of three years following the inmate's release; and the number of inmates who were not released, and the reasons why they were not released, from a county correctional facility during regular business hours. The data is to be analyzed to determine whether the rates and nature of rearrests and convictions differ according to whether an inmate received services in accordance with the provisions of the substitute bill. The coordinator is required to annually prepare and transmit the findings to the warden, keeper, or administrator of a county correctional facility, as appropriate; the superintendent, director, or other chief administrative officer of the County Board of Social Services or welfare agency, as appropriate; the governing body of the county in which the correctional facility is located; and the Commissioner or Corrections.

The county reentry coordinator in each county also is required to work collaboratively with the warden, director, or administrator in the county correctional facility, develop peer counseling programs in the county correctional facility that support the treatment of county inmates with substance use disorders. The warden, director, or administrator is authorized to develop initiatives to provide inmates in the custody of the county correctional facility with access to professional substance use disorder counseling.

Finally, the provisions of the substitute bill require each county reentry coordinator to meet regularly with community stakeholders who may offer guidance for evaluating the needs of and providing services to inmates in county correctional facilities including, but not limited to: the Commissioner of Corrections, or a designee; the Commissioner of Human Services, or a designee; the warden, director, or administrator of the county correctional facility; the superintendent, director, or other chief administrative officer of the County Board of Social Services or welfare agency, as appropriate; the county human services director, or a designee; the county mental health administrator, or a designee; the president of a county community college, or a designee; reentry services providers in the county; substance use disorder treatment providers in the county, and a person who previously has received substance use disorder services in the county.

Based on the guidance received during the meetings, the county reentry coordinator is required to establish best practices for preparing county inmates for release; identify services available in the county that may be needed by inmates upon release from a county correctional facility including, but not limited to, housing, food, medical care, clothing, substance use disorder treatment; mental health services, employment assistance, and education assistance; and make appropriate recommendations to the county correctional facility and County Board of Social Services or welfare agency with respect to preparing county inmates for successful reentry into the community and reducing recidivism.