

LEADERSHIP for JUSTICE INNOVATION, LLC
deod622@gmail.com / 716-860-8687

June 22, 2022

To Whom It May Concern:

I am pleased to submit this Letter of Support for the application of the Reentry Association of Western New York (RAWNY) for funding for its Reentry One-Stop, a single point of access system for reentry services in Monroe County. I have held positions overseeing and advancing reentry efforts at the federal, state and local levels for well over a decade. My experience in implementing the Federal Second Chance Act as Director of the Bureau of Justice Assistance and establishing the Country Reentry Task Forces at the NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) is that establishing a collaborative coordinating body to champion and advance local reentry programs (like the Reentry One-Stop proposed by RAWNY) is a central component of a successful local reentry effort. It will have far reaching economic and workforce development benefits not only for returning persons and their families, but for the entire region by adding skilled workers to the workforce, filling vacant jobs, reducing poverty, increasing the tax base, and reducing crime and recidivism.

During my time as DCJS Commissioner, I worked with RAWNY Executive Director Ann Graham when she served as Director of Monroe County's Reentry Task Force. Ann is a strong and effective leader, knowledgeable about evidenced-based reentry strategies and programs, and a strong advocate on behalf of formerly incarcerated persons and their families. She is well-versed in the challenges and collateral consequences facing individuals returning from prisons and jails. The mission and objectives Ann and the members of RAWNY have identified in their proposal evidence their strong background in the reentry field and precisely reflect the unique challenges and opportunities in Monroe County.

I have had the privilege of addressing RAWNY partners and sharing lessons learned from my work over the past five years with the Erie County Reentry Coalition since that group was formed as part of the Racial Justice Task Force of the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo. Similar to the proposal advanced by RAWNY, the Coalition opened the Service Link Stop in 2020 to serve persons returning from prisons and jails in WNY by connecting them to services provided by member organizations for housing, job training, educational programs, behavioral health services, mentoring and more. Fourteen reentry programs offer services on site and efforts are underway to create a 2-1-1 site to expand services beyond the physical location.

With training and technical assistance from the Community Foundation and support from the Erie County Reentry Coalition, the Erie County Sheriff's Department, Erie County Department of Mental Health and Peaceprints, a well-regarded not-for-profit reentry organization in Buffalo and Rochester have successfully competed for substantial federal and private grant funds for evidenced-based reentry programs.

In my view, the proposal advanced by RAWNY has the same potential to champion the growth of successful evidence-based reentry programs, secure federal, state, and private funding, and create new benefits and opportunities for people returning to our communities from prisons and jails and their families. I urge New York State, Monroe County and the City of Rochester to join in funding this important Workforce Development Project.

Denise E. O'Donnell
President & CEO
Leadership for Justice Innovation, LLC

Cc: Ann Graham
Executive Director
Reentry Association of Western New York