

REINTEGRATION OF FEMALE OFFENDERS

Support for the successful reintegration of female offenders

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma (LWVOK) believes that addressing the basic needs of women who are released from prison can reduce the rate of recidivism and contribute to restoring these women to productive citizenship. These needs include the restoration of voting rights, housing, medical care and employment.

Voting rights should be restored as soon as a woman leaves prison. The current system of restoring voting rights only after the full original judgment and sentence is completed is confusing. As soon as someone leaves prison, that person should be eligible to vote.

Title VIII public housing requires that tenants who have had a conviction for either drugs or violent behavior within the preceding three years show evidence of completion of a course in either substance abuse or anger management. The Department of Corrections needs to insure that such courses are available to female prisoners before they are released. The Department of Corrections should assist female offenders in obtaining information necessary to get housing, health care, and employment before they are released.

Female prisoners should have access to adequate health care while they are incarcerated. They should be provided with a clear record of all medical treatment they have received when they are released. The Department of Corrections should assist prisoners to be released with information that will assist them in continuing receiving health care after they have been released. As access to dental care is the most difficult to obtain upon release, the Department of Corrections should recommend what is necessary to see that funding for this is available.

The Department of Corrections should provide programs that improve female prisoners job skills. The legislature should be educated in the importance of such programs to ensure that they are properly funded. Prior to their release from prison, women should be guided toward viable job possibilities and assisted in finding solutions to problems such as transportation to a job. Upon release from prison, transportation to work becomes an issue, and the LWVOK should work in the community to create innovative ways to meet these needs.

Consensus approved 2007

BACKGROUND

Recognizing that Oklahoma has a high rate of female incarceration, the LWVOK began a two-year study of the issue in 2005. The study focused on the barriers that women faced when they left prison. Four basic barriers were identified: the restoration of voting rights, housing, medical care and employment.

The study was designed to suggest ways of overcoming these barriers rather than

simply identifying them. Much of the responsibility for overcoming these barriers fell to the Department of Corrections. However, following the example of the League of Women Voters of Metropolitan Tulsa, the LWVOK recommended that leagues in other areas of the state develop similar directories of local services available. These directories would be provided to the Department of Corrections to be given to women who were leaving prison as a means to assist them in their reintegration efforts.

The LWVOK also promised to assist the Department of Corrections in achieving its goal of successful reintegration of female offenders by making the legislature aware of the importance of job training and by keeping directories of services up to date.

The directories developed by members of the LWVOK eventually became a resource known as the 211 service hotline. It was sometimes referred to as the heartline. It was a phone number for locating service providers in a variety of different areas.