



## Contra Costa County leaders urging parole reform

By Rick Radin  
Contra Costa Times

Posted: 09/26/2009 12:59:53 PM PDT

Updated: 09/28/2009 07:48:38 AM PDT

With a recidivism rate for ex-offenders of 65 percent to 70 percent statewide, Contra Costa County communities identified as crime hot spots are seeking ways to improve the parole system.

Leaders of communities such as Richmond, Pittsburg and Bay Point say they may be able to take a huge bite out of the crime rate if they can coordinate health care, job training and placement, housing, mental health and substance abuse treatment for parolees and probationers.

"We have a fragmented and disconnected system now," said DeVone Boggan, who heads the office of Neighborhood Safety in Richmond. "People paroled into Contra Costa get \$200 and a backpack."

Boggan and other reform backers, such as Contra Costa supervisors John Gioia and Federal Glover, want to bring together the government and nonprofit groups serving ex-offenders to create a seamless system for help. They also want to seek money from federal grants and private foundations to expand services.

"If we can help people get a job, the recidivism rate is less," Gioia said. "If they are able to hold onto that job, the rate is even lower."

The campaign, modeled on a more mature, though unfinished, program in Alameda County, is especially urgent given that the state may release

about 40,000 inmates before their scheduled parole dates in response to a federal court ruling about overcrowding.

California paroled 754 ex-offenders into Contra Costa County in 2005. After one year, 373 had returned to prison, after two years 468 had returned and after three years 496 were back, for an average of 65.8 percent, according to figures from the state Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

Organizers are working with the Oakland-based Urban Strategies Coalition, that has guided a program in Alameda County for three years. The Alameda County Reentry Network has established a health clinic in West Oakland for parolees and the homeless and applied for federal funding to pay for jobs training and placement, health care, and substance abuse programs for prisoners about to be released from Santa Rita Jail in Dublin.

The coalition is holding a meeting Wednesday at Contra Costa College to discuss ideas for a plan that will take seven to nine months to complete.

One provider of services to parolees is excited about what's being discussed and plans to attend the meeting. Barbara Becnel is executive director of Neighborhood House of North Richmond, a nonprofit group that runs a live-in alcohol and drug treatment program for about 20 parolees and probationers.

"There's not enough help and not everybody knows what everybody else is doing," Becnel said. "What we need is a network, a holistic approach to helping people."

**if you go WHAT: Re-entry reform  
kickoff meeting WHEN: 1 to 3 p.m. Wednesday  
WHERE: Fireside Room,  
Contra Costa College, 2600 Mission Bell Drive,**

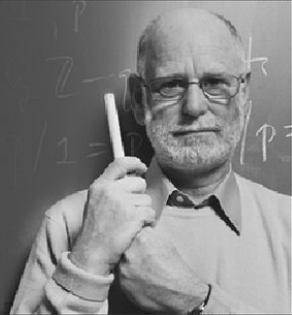
Advertisement



**Florida Tech**  
UNIVERSITY ONLINE

## Bring the Classroom to Your Home With a Degree Online From Florida Tech

**APPLY TODAY!**  
FloridaTechOnline.com/FD | 1-888-253-5946



Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™



San Pablo

Advertisement



**End-to-End Training as It Should Be: 100% ONLINE!**

**Earn Your Master Certificate in Internet Marketing**

- SEO & Paid Search
- Online Branding
- Web Analytics
- Internet Law
- Media Buying
- Social Media

**→** 1-800-268-9943  
USanFranOnline.com/FD

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™