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## Returning Home Policy Brief

# One Year Out Experiences of Prisoners Returning to Cleveland

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April 2007

*Returning Home: Understanding the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry* is a longitudinal study of prisoner reentry in Maryland, Illinois, Ohio, and Texas. The study explores prisoner reentry across multiple domains: the individual, family, and peer group experience, as documented through interviews with prisoners before and after release from prison; the community experience, as documented through interviews with key community stakeholders and focus groups with residents; and the broader policy environment at the state level.

In Ohio, the George Gund Foundation, Health Foundation of Greater Cincinnati, Cleveland Foundation, Smith Richardson Foundation, Annie E. Casey Foundation, Ohio Office of Criminal Justice Services, and the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction provided support for the project. Research Support Services, based in Chicago, conducted the original data collection under the expert direction of Dr. Alisú Schoua-Glusberg.

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With more than 650,000 prisoners released nationwide each year, the reintegration of men and women leaving prison is challenging policymakers and practitioners at the federal, state, and local levels. Often cited as being of greatest concern is the high rate of recidivism among former prisoners—half of whom return to prison within three years—yet, recidivism is only one outcome in the process of leaving prison and returning home. To examine this entire process, in 2001, the Urban Institute launched a four-state, longitudinal study entitled *Returning Home: Understanding the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry*. The study explores the experiences of released men and women returning to communities in Maryland, Illinois, Ohio, and Texas, and the factors influencing their success and failure. (See the sidebar “Returning Home Study Methodology” for more details about the data collection and analysis.)

This research brief presents the final results from the *Returning Home* study in Ohio, based on the third and final follow-up interviews conducted with nearly 300 former prisoners at least 12 months after release who were living in Cleveland and the surrounding area. (See sidebar “Profile of Study Participants” for a description of the men interviewed.) We describe the lives of the men during their first year out, including their ability to find stable housing and reunite with family after release, and identify factors associated with getting a job, and avoiding substance use and recidivism. We also discuss the policy implications of our findings and offer specific recommendations for helping released prisoners become healthy and productive members of the communities to which they return.

This research brief is intended to serve as a foundation for policy discussions about how released prisoners can successfully reintegrate into their communities, whether in Cleveland or in similar cities around the country. (See the sidebar “Ohio Returning Home: Prior Reports” for previous reports.)

## Key Findings

- *Housing.* One year out, many men were living with family, yet in somewhat unstable housing situations and less-than-desirable neighborhoods. A third were living with a spouse or intimate partner and over a third with a parent or sibling. Almost half considered their living arrangements temporary, with nearly a third having moved several times during the year. About half said that drug dealing was a major problem in their neighborhood, and almost a quarter were living with former prisoners, illicit drug users, or serious alcohol users.
- *Employment.* At one year, only 37 percent had a full-time job and another 11 percent were working part-time. Employed men had close partner relationships and helpful families, and were in good mental and physical health. Also, men who had held a job during their incarceration and those who had worked a greater number of months after release were more likely to be working one year out.
- *Family and Friends.* After release, most men reported high-quality relationships with their families and intimate partners. When asked to name the most important thing keeping them out of prison, one in four men identified family support, and another 16 percent said avoiding certain people and situations. Of those who had returned to prison, 21 percent said failing to avoid certain people and situations was the reason behind their reincarceration.
- *Programs and Services:* Participation in certain programs and services improved prisoners' chances for reentry success. About two-thirds of men participated in programs and services after release. Participation in substance abuse treatment immediately after release reduced the likelihood of frequent drug use one year out. Additionally, men who earned their GED while in prison were more likely to be employed a year after release.
- *Health.* Over half of the men reported suffering from a chronic physical health condition after release, 29 percent showed symptoms of depression, and 20 percent showed signs of post-traumatic stress disorder. The number of men reporting each condition increased during the first year out.
- *Substance Use.* Drugs and alcohol were a problem for many men during the first year after release. Over one-third reported drug use or alcohol intoxication in the 30 days prior to the one-year interview, and about half of these men reported more than weekly use. About a quarter of those who returned to prison said that their drug use was the reason. Men most likely to be using drugs frequently after release had drug-using or criminal family members, used drugs early on after release (one to six months out), and had anticipated difficulty staying out of prison. Frequent substance use one year out was less likely among men who had strong attachment to children and those who were required to maintain telephone contact with their parole officer.
- *Parole Violations and Recidivism.* Over half of men on supervision reported violating a condition of release, typically by associating with other parolees or by visiting places where drugs were used. Not surprisingly, these parole violators were more likely (than nonviolators) to be returned to prison the first year out. Reincarceration data from the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) showed that 15 percent of men returned to prison, with four out of five returns caused by a new crime commission.

## Housing and Community Residence

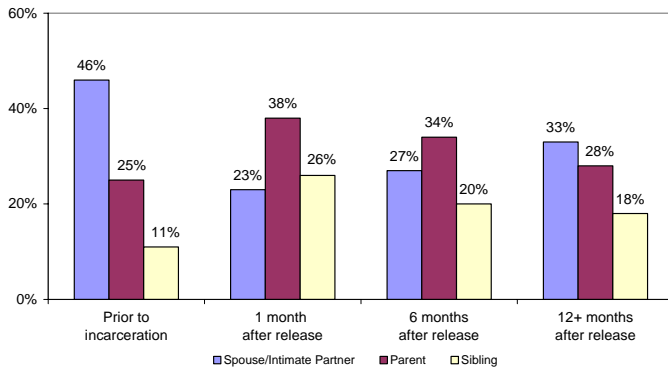
Finding a place to live is one of the first obstacles that former prisoners must overcome after they are released. In this study, the men recognized the significance of housing to their success after release, with 84 percent anticipating in prerelease interviews that having a place to live would be an important factor in staying out of prison.

Over one-third had lived in their own home before incarceration, but immediately after release, only 18 percent were living in their own home—though by one year out, this had risen to slightly more than 25 percent. One in ten men reported trouble finding housing because of their criminal record, with a

similar percentage residing in public or Section 8 housing.

Composition of the households in which men lived after release changed substantially from prior to their incarceration and continued to change during their first year out of prison (figure 1). More men depended on a parent for housing and fewer lived with an intimate partner. Nearly half were living with a spouse or intimate partner before incarceration, yet one year later, only 33 percent were in such a living arrangement. Rather, men relied much more on parents or siblings for housing after release than they did previously, particularly in the first six months following release. One year out, over a third were living with a parent or sibling.

**Figure 1. People Respondent Lived with at Each Interview**



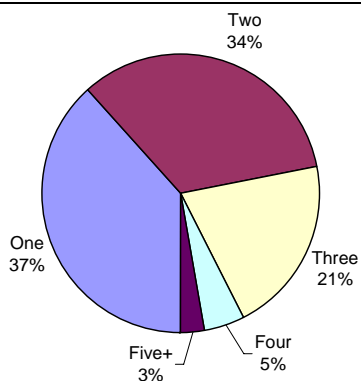
Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive (i.e., a respondent may indicate more than one person he lived with).

By the end of the first year, nearly half (46 percent) were living in the same neighborhood they had lived in before incarceration. Those who had moved to a new neighborhood said they did so primarily because they wanted to avoid trouble in the old neighborhood, they had lost their previous housing, or because their family or friends had moved.

Men reported low to moderate disorder (e.g., drug sales, dangers, opportunities for trouble) in their neighborhoods, though they lived in increasingly more disorderly neighborhoods during the first year out. Forty-nine percent cited drug selling as a major problem in their neighborhood. Nonetheless, more than three out of four believed that their neighborhood was a safe place to live, although only 40 percent thought their neighborhood was a good place to find a job.

A majority (63 percent) of the men had lived in more than one place during the year after release, and nearly a third had moved several times (figure 2).

**Figure 2. Number of Places Respondent Lived since Release**



Note: Percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding.

Nearly half (46 percent) considered their living arrangements temporary, reporting at the final interview that they would only stay a few more weeks or months, while 54 percent expected to stay about a year or more. Nearly two-thirds were paying for housing, compared with only 39 percent in the first month after release—though notably, most who thought their housing situation was temporary a month after release still regarded their housing as temporary one year out.

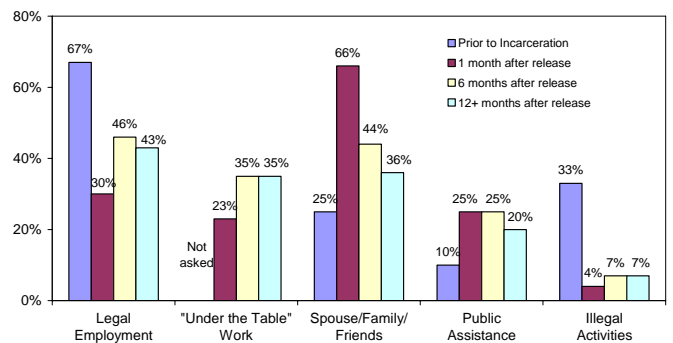
For about a quarter of the men, their housing situation could be jeopardizing their prospects for successful long-term reintegration: 17 percent lived with someone who had been in prison and 23 percent with someone who often drank to the point of intoxication or used illegal drugs. These situations could be especially harmful given that many had supervision conditions restricting their proximity to alcohol and drugs, as well as interactions with former prisoners.

*Employment and Financial Circumstances*

Finding and maintaining a legal job after release can be critical to successful reintegration, yet many former prisoners face serious challenges when seeking employment after release, especially in the urban areas where they tend to reside. During the six months before prison, over two-thirds (70 percent) had been employed, typically in construction or landscaping, factory work, and food service jobs.

Immediately after release, men relied on financial support from several sources other than legal employment, especially family and friends as well as “under the table” work and public assistance (figure 3). One year out, 43 percent relied on legal

**Figure 3. Reported Sources of Financial Support**

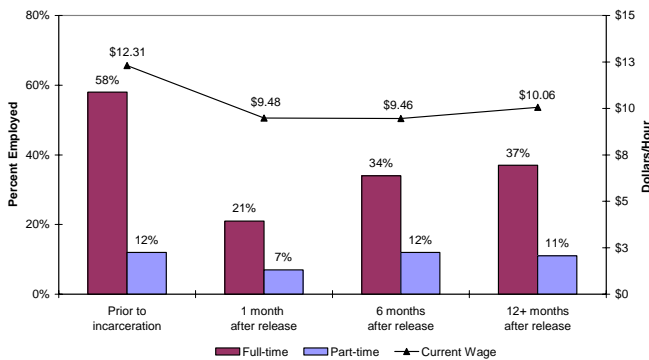


Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive (i.e., a respondent may indicate more than one source of support).

employment, 36 percent on family and friends, 20 percent on public assistance, and less than 10 percent on illegal activities.

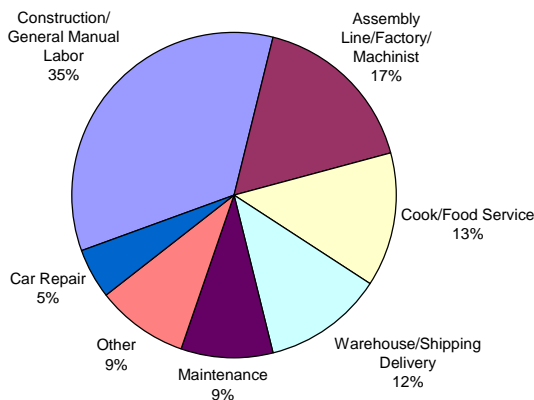
Incarceration had a substantial impact on the likelihood of employment and level of wages earned by men in the study (figure 4). One month after release, men reported limited success in finding employment: only one in five (21 percent) were employed full-time. However, the percentage employed full-time increased to 37 percent by one year after release. Among those working, hourly wages declined from an average of \$12 prior to incarceration to \$9 in the first six months after release and then increased slightly to \$10 by one year out. Of those who had looked for a job since release, 81 percent reported that their criminal history had affected their job search.

**Figure 4. Preprison and Postrelease Employment and Hourly Wages**



Note: At each postrelease interview, an additional 2, 3, and 1 percent, respectively, reported employment but did not indicate the number of hours employed and thus are not represented in the figure. Current wage means based on those employed who provided salary information (Ns = 264, 103, 150, and 133).

**Figure 5. Type of Job at Final Interview (N = 139)**



Perhaps because of their criminal record, personal connections were very important to respondents in finding jobs, as 57 percent found a job by talking to family or friends. Over one-quarter found a job through an employment agency or by walking in and applying. The primary types of jobs respondents held one year out were construction and general labor, factory work, and food service, similar to their jobs before incarceration (figure 5).

### Family and Peers

Research on prisoner reentry and family experiences has often focused on how the incarceration of someone affects his or her family members, particularly children. Less is known about the effects of family relationships on the reintegration success and failure of formerly incarcerated persons. Prior to entering prison, most of the men in the study were single (63 percent), with 23 percent married or living with an intimate partner. However, over half (58 percent) had at least one child under age 18.

In general, men in the study felt close to their families. One year after release, men reported an average of six close family relationships, and only 4 percent claimed to have no close family members. Although 57 percent reported having a spouse or intimate partner (33 percent said they were married or living as married), this person was rarely named as their closest family member. Rather, 40 percent reported being closest to their mother and 26 percent to a sibling, which is consistent with similar reports at earlier interviews. About one-third (35 percent) of men with minor children were living with their kids, a substantial decline from the 57 percent living with minor children before their incarceration.

While men in the study had high expectations for the quality of family relationships and family support they would receive after release, they did not fully recognize the importance of family until they had been in the community a few months. When asked before release what things would be important to keeping them from returning to prison, many respondents mentioned support from family (63 percent) and spending time with children (46 percent), though these were not indicated as frequently as obtaining employment (90 percent), finding a place to live (84 percent), and abstaining from substance use (72 percent).

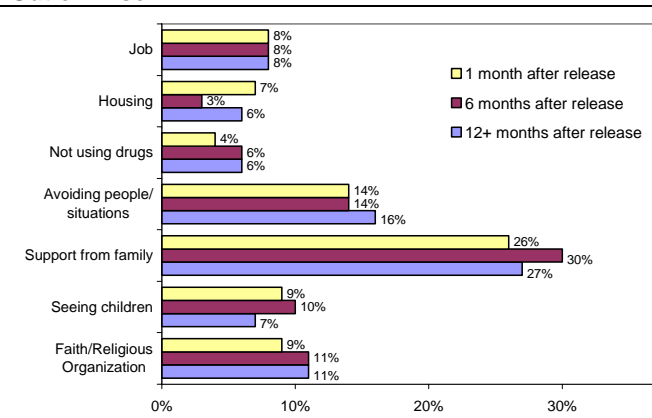


When asked a similar question a month after release, the largest percentage (26 percent) identified support from family as the *most* important thing that had kept them out of prison, and an additional 9 percent named seeing their children (figure 6). Support from family continued to be the most frequently mentioned factor at all subsequent interviews by a wide margin over employment, housing, not using drugs, avoiding people or situations, and faith or religious organizations.

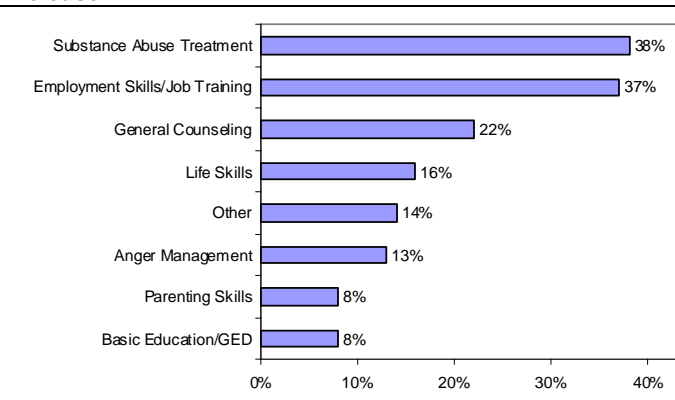
Thus, it is not surprising that men gave high ratings to their family for emotional and tangible support and to the overall quality of their relationships (exceeding 3 on a scale of 1 to 4), both of which increased between the first and final interviews after release. Additionally, men with a spouse or intimate partner reported high-quality relationships, though this declined slightly by a year after release.

Although family and friends can have a significant influence on the reintegration process of those recently released from prison, this impact is not always positive. Family members often have their

**Figure 6. Factors Mentioned as Important to Staying Out of Prison**



**Figure 7. Participation in Programs during Year after Release**



own problems with substance abuse and the law. A large portion of men in the study had family members with a history of conviction (64 percent) and incarceration (62 percent), and 30 percent had relatives who were in jail or prison. Family members of nearly two-thirds (64 percent) had problems with drugs and alcohol.

Friends of released prisoners in the study also showed evidence of past criminal involvement. In fact, during the year after release, men were increasingly more likely to have contact with friends who were negative influences: 74 percent had a friend who had been to prison during the first month out, and this increased to 84 percent by one year after release. A third reported primarily positive peer influences a month after release, but one year out, only one in five men (22 percent) had mostly positive peer influences.

*Program Participation and Postrelease Attitudes*

Prisoners who participate in programs and services while incarcerated are often better prepared for the transition back to their communities and have a greater chance of success after release than prisoners who do not participate in such programs. Among the men in this study, those who received counseling in prison were less likely to report substance use in the first month after release than those who did not report participating.<sup>1</sup>

After release, former prisoners often find it difficult to continue programs and services as they readjust to their communities and focus on finding employment. However, during the year after release, about two-thirds (66 percent) of the men in the study reported having participated in at least one program since their release. Most commonly, they participated in substance abuse treatment (including Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous), employment skills or job training, and general counseling (figure 7).

Prisoners' attitudes and beliefs about themselves and the world around them can also affect their ability to reconnect with family, friends, and the community after release. Most men in the study expressed readiness to change their criminal behavior. Just prior to release, 80 percent reported that they would not use drugs after release, 85 percent said they would not commit crimes, and 89 percent claimed

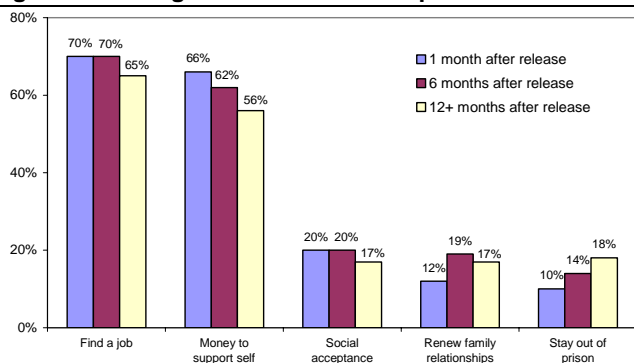
they would give up the friends and hangouts that often led them into trouble. A year after release, 87 percent said they had given up old hangouts or friends who were negative influences (self-reported drug use and criminal activity are described later in this brief).

Respondents were asked to report how “easy” or “hard” it would be to succeed in nine areas. Across all three postrelease interviews, the men consistently reported struggling with two of these nine challenges: finding a job and making enough money to support themselves. However, over three-quarters consistently said it had been easy to stay out of prison, refrain from criminal activity, find housing, provide food, achieve social acceptance, stay in good health, and renew relationships with family (figure 8).

### Physical and Mental Health

Prisoners tend to have higher rates of chronic and infectious diseases and mental illness than individuals in the general population. Nonetheless, most men (79 percent) in the study expressed positive opinions about their physical health shortly after release from prison. In spite of these positive self-assessments, over half reported being diagnosed with a chronic physical health condition (e.g., high blood pressure, asthma, arthritis, and high cholesterol) at each of the postrelease interviews (figure 9), rising to 59 percent at the final interview. About half of these men reported receiving treatment or prescription drugs for their health condition, with treatment or medication use rising slightly at each wave since release from prison. By one year out, the rate of treatment and prescription drug use was just above that reported during prison.

**Figure 8. Reintegration Difficulties Reported after Release**



### Profile of Study Participants

The study participants consisted of the following:

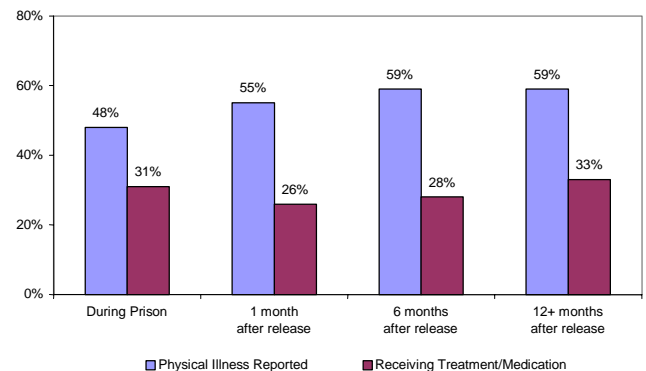
- 424 men, who served an average of two years<sup>a</sup> in an Ohio correctional facility and were living in the Cleveland area; one year after release, 294 men were interviewed (56 in jail or prison).<sup>b</sup>
- The average age was 36 years; 74 percent were African American, 18 percent white, and 8 percent other; 5 percent identified themselves as Hispanic.<sup>c</sup>
- 63 percent were single and had never been married, 23 percent were married, 67 percent had children, and 31 percent lived with a minor child before entering prison.
- 55 percent had a high school diploma before prison and 58 percent had worked at least 40 hours per week in the six months prior to incarceration.
- 65 percent had previously served time in prison and 44 percent spent time in a juvenile correctional facility.
- 47 percent were incarcerated for a violent crime, 24 percent for a drug crime, 15 percent for a property crime, and 13 percent for technical violations.
- 72 percent had used controlled substances and 60 percent reported recent alcohol intoxication before entering prison.

<sup>a</sup> To be consistent with data collection in other *Returning Home* states, we selected men who had been sentenced to at least one year in state prison. Many individuals in Ohio prisons are serving sentences of less than one year.

<sup>b</sup> As noted in the *Methodology* sidebar, corrections for attrition bias yielded largely similar results; thus, only uncorrected original data were analyzed to obtain the percentages reported in this brief.

<sup>c</sup> The racial composition of men in the study is consistent with the composition of all prisoners released to Cuyahoga County.

**Figure 9. Reported Physical Health Conditions and Receipt of Medication or Treatment during and after Release**



A smaller but important share of men in the study exhibited a need for mental health services (figure 10). Reports of problems with depression and other mental illnesses increased from 16 percent during prison to 21 percent at one year out. About half of these men reported receiving treatment or prescription medication (9 to 11 percent).

Responses to standard mental-health screening questions indicate that a higher proportion (23 percent) were likely to be depressed one month after release, increasing to 29 percent at one year out (figure 11).<sup>2</sup> Moreover, more men reported symptoms consistent with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) related to their incarceration experiences at a year out (20 percent) than at one month after release (14 percent).<sup>3</sup>

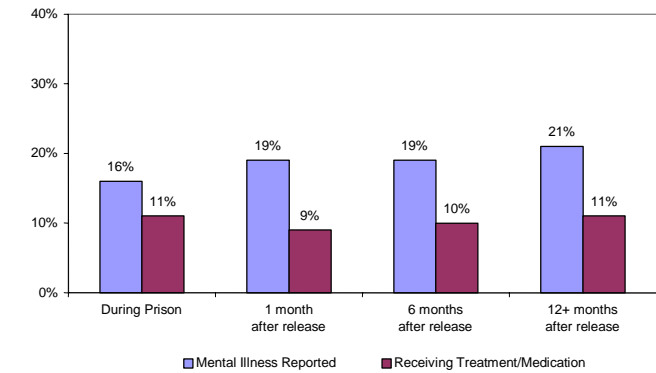
Most of the men in the study were without any type of insurance coverage one month after release. Of the small share who had insurance (16 percent), half were covered under Medicare or Medicaid and the rest through private insurance, Veterans' benefits, or other insurance. The proportion with health insurance increased gradually during the year after release, reaching 27 percent at one year.

### Substance Use

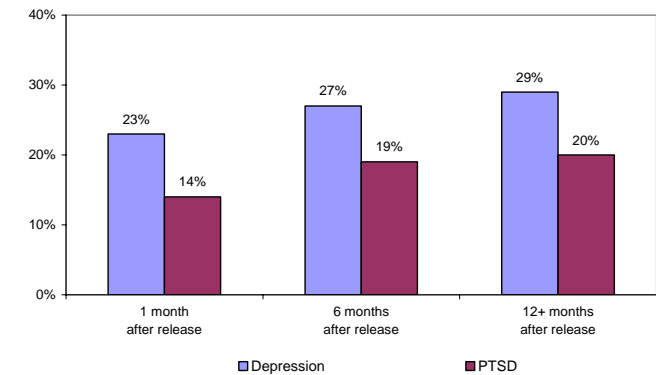
A history of serious and frequent substance use is a common characteristic of incarcerated populations, with at least half estimated to have a drug or alcohol problem requiring treatment. The substance use histories of men in the study mirror these national data, with a significant share reporting extensive and serious prior involvement with drugs and alcohol. Nearly three-quarters (72 percent) reported some drug use (most frequently marijuana and cocaine), 60 percent reported alcohol intoxication, and over half reported *daily* drug use or intoxication in the six months prior to prison.

A month after release, about a quarter of the men reported drug use or alcohol intoxication, with use increasing to 35 percent by one year out (figure 12). Drug use alone increased from 14 to 25 percent over this period (figure 13). About half who reported drug use or intoxication reported more than weekly use. And not surprisingly, drug and alcohol use was related to an array of problems, most commonly relationship problems and problems at home. During

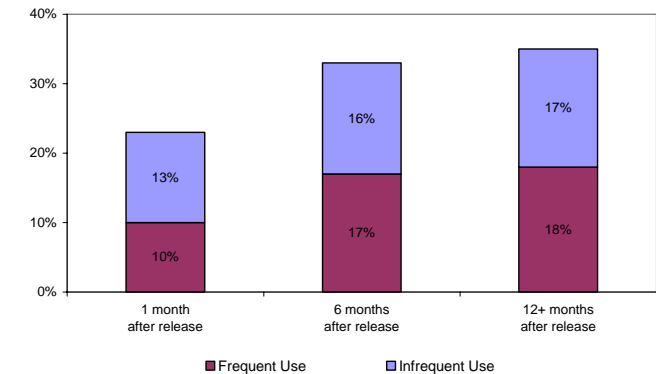
**Figure 10. Reported Mental Health Conditions and Receipt of Medication or Treatment during and after Release**



**Figure 11. Depression and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Diagnoses**



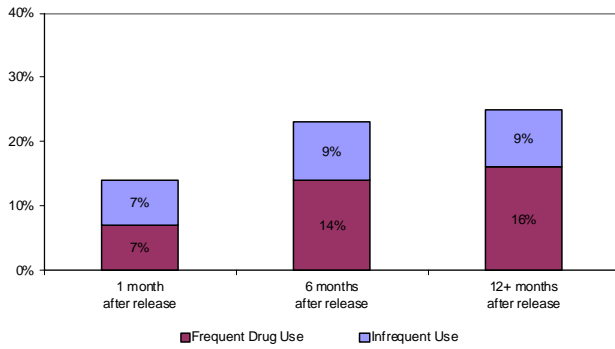
**Figure 12. Reported Drug Use or Alcohol Intoxication by Frequency**



Note: "Frequent" is defined as more than weekly use.

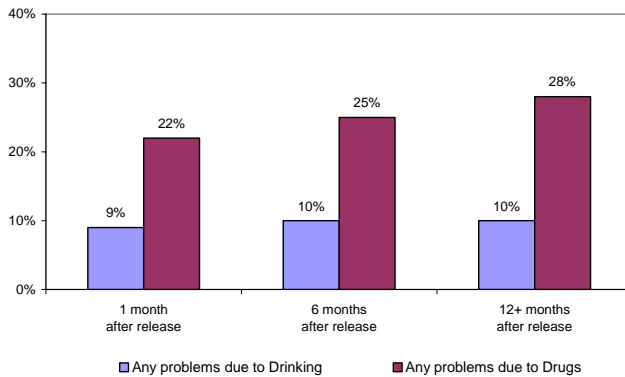
the year after release, about a quarter of drug users reported problems due to drug use and about 10 percent of alcohol users reported problems due to alcohol use. Problems due to drug use increased slightly from the first to the last interview (figure 14).

**Figure 13. Reported Drug Use by Frequency**



Note: "Frequent" is defined as more than weekly use.

**Figure 14. Reported Problems Related to Drug and Alcohol Use in Past 30 Days**



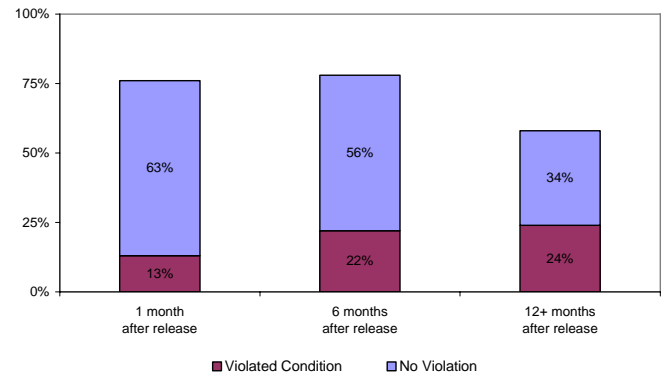
Note: Percentages based on men who reported any drug or alcohol use at each time point.

### Postrelease Supervision

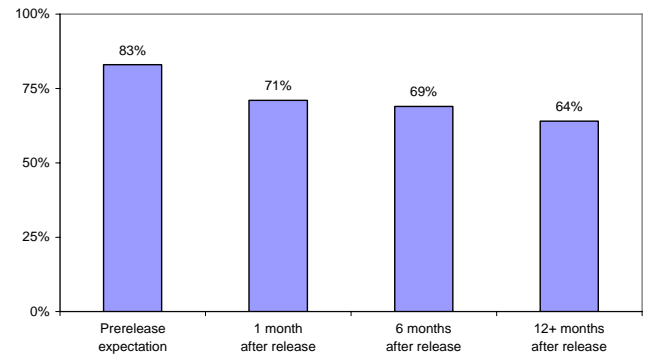
The majority of Ohio prisoners sentenced to a year or more in prison are released to a period of community supervision during which they are expected to follow parole conditions enforced by the Adult Parole Authority (APA) unit of the ODRC. Consistent with this policy, about three-quarters (76 percent) of men in the study reported being on supervision a month after release, although only 58 percent were on supervision a year out (figure 15).

Prior to release, most of the men who expected to be on supervision thought that their parole officer (PO) would be helpful after release (83 percent). One month out, nearly three-quarters (71 percent) reported that their PO was helpful with their transition home, especially by understanding their situation and providing encouragement. One year

**Figure 15. Percentage of Respondents on Supervision and Percentage Who Violated a Condition**



**Figure 16. PO Reported as Helpful with Transition Home**



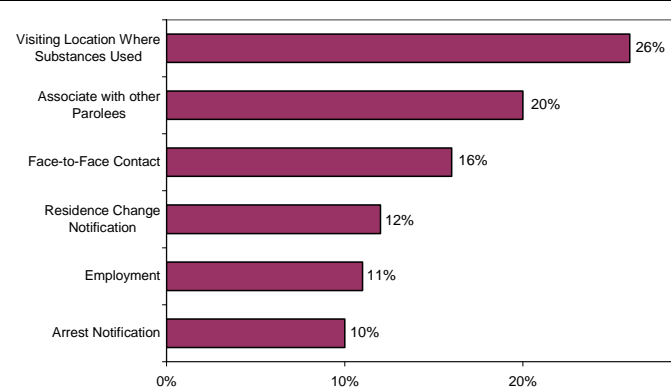
Note: Percentages based on supervised men only.

out, fewer but still a majority of men (64 percent) felt that their PO had been helpful (figure 16).

The ODRC maintains a variety of special conditions that can be required of a released prisoner. Supervised men in the study reported an average of 10 such conditions. The majority (83 percent) reported complying with their parole conditions one month after release, but this declined to 58 percent a year after release. The most commonly reported violations were visiting places where controlled substances were used and associating with other parolees without written permission. Other violations involved failing to maintain mandatory interactions with their supervision officer, including face-to-face contact, and failure to notify POs about a residence change or arrest (figure 17).



**Figure 17. Reported Violations among Those on Supervision One Year Out (N = 171)**



Note: Percentages are based on supervised men required to comply with each condition.

### Criminal Involvement

According to research by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, most prisoners have long criminal records and exhibit high rates of recidivism. Such repeat involvement with the criminal justice system was strongly evident in the *Ohio Returning Home* study. Criminal histories were extensive and began early in life: two-thirds (65 percent) had served previous prison terms, and 44 percent had spent time in a juvenile correctional facility. Despite these extensive criminal histories, 77 percent of men in the study expected it to be “pretty easy” or “very easy” to stay out of prison following release.

To assess their continued involvement in criminal activity, men in the study were asked to self-report any crime committed since release. One year after release, nearly three in ten (29 percent) reported that they had committed at least one crime at some point after release, with drug possession (51 percent) and drug dealing (32 percent) most often reported. Yet surprisingly, an even larger group (40 percent) reported that they had been arrested at least once since release.<sup>4</sup>

We also examined official records of reincarceration obtained from the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction and found that 15 percent had been returned to prison in the year following release. Of those reincarcerated, 81 percent were returned for a new crime, with the remainder returned for a parole violation.

We were also able to interview men who returned to prison and we asked them why they had been reincarcerated (figure 18). Of the 58 men who were returned to prison, we interviewed 50 during their new reincarceration.<sup>5</sup> The two most common reasons men gave for their return were drug use (23 percent) and not avoiding people or situations that could get them into trouble (21 percent). Difficulties supporting themselves financially (17 percent) and unemployment (11 percent) were also cited as reasons.

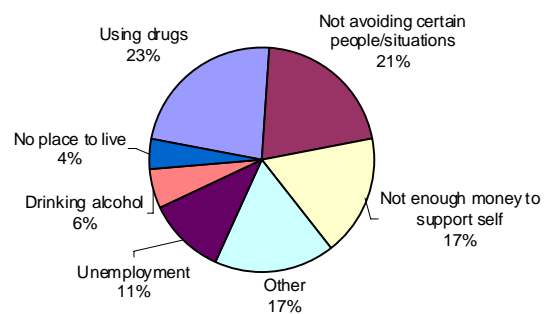
The remainder of this brief further explores the reasons for success and failure among men in the study, focusing on employment, substance use, and criminal activity in the year following release.

### Understanding Reentry Success and Failure

#### Employment

To understand why some men were more successful at obtaining employment upon release than others, we used multiple regression to identify factors associated with current employment a year after release. Analyses indicated that family, early employment, postrelease services, and certain parole conditions were important to finding postrelease employment. Men who had close relationships with a spouse or intimate partner and whose families were more helpful than they had anticipated were more likely to be employed. Earning a GED while in prison also increased the likelihood of postrelease employment. Additionally, men who had held a job during their incarceration, those who had worked more the first six months after release, and those with a supervision condition to maintain employment were more likely to be working. On the

**Figure 18. Reason Reported for Reincarceration (N = 50)**



Note: Percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding. Cases with missing information not included.

**Table 1. Predictors of Employment One Year after Release**

Those who had...	Those who had...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• earned their GED while in prison</li> <li>• very close partner relationships after release</li> <li>• families that were more helpful than expected</li> <li>• jobs while in prison</li> <li>• more time employed since release</li> <li>• supervision conditions requiring employment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a physical health condition after release</li> <li>• depression after release</li> </ul>
<b>...were more likely to be employed.</b>	<b>...were less likely to be employed.</b>

other hand, men who suffered from a physical health condition or depression during the first six months after release were less able to find work (table 1).<sup>6</sup>

### *Drug Use*

To understand what factors influenced released prisoners' ability to avoid illegal substance use after release, we examined how various factors affected frequent (more than weekly) drug use one year after release (table 2). Analyses indicated that fathers who were closely attached to their children had a reduced likelihood of drug use. Additionally, those who received substance abuse treatment immediately after release were less likely to be frequent drug users. Required telephone contact with their parole officer, given that the men were on parole, also inhibited the likelihood of frequent drug use (however, men on parole in general were more likely to report frequent use).

Factors that increased the chances of frequent drug use a year after release included self-reported intentions to commit crime or use drugs expressed while still in prison, expectations that staying out of prison would be hard after release, *any* drug use immediately following release and frequent drug use six months out, and negative family influences (i.e., having a family member who had served time in prison, been convicted, or used drugs).<sup>7</sup>

### *Criminal Activity*

To distinguish between men likely to desist from crime after release from those likely to recidivate,

**Table 2. Predictors of Frequent Drug Use One Year after Release**

Those who had...	Those who had...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• close attachment to their children</li> <li>• received substance abuse treatment immediately after release</li> <li>• telephone contact with their PO as a parole requirement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• admitted intentions while still incarcerated to continue criminal activity or drug use after release</li> <li>• expected difficulty staying out of prison after release</li> <li>• negative family influences</li> <li>• used any drugs immediately after release</li> <li>• used drugs frequently six months after release</li> <li>• been placed on parole immediately after release</li> </ul>
<b>...were less likely to use drugs frequently.</b>	<b>...were more likely to use drugs frequently.</b>

we examined the factors that predicted criminal behavior using two measures of recidivism: self-reported rearrest and official reincarceration in an Ohio prison (as reported by the ODRC). Men who did not report an arrest in the year following release were more likely to have served a longer sentence, had supportive partner relationships during incarceration, and were receiving treatment or medication for a health condition. Those on supervision a month after release and supervised men who were required to maintain telephone contact with their PO were also less likely to report being arrested (however, those with more positive attitudes toward their PO were more likely to self-report rearrest).<sup>8</sup> Factors that increased the likelihood of reporting arrest included preprison problems caused by drinking, living with someone who uses drugs or drinks alcohol to the point of intoxication, and serious involvement in crime as a juvenile, as indicated by time spent in a juvenile detention facility (table 3).<sup>9</sup>

Housing, employment, and attitude toward release were key factors associated with reincarceration at some point in the year after release (table 4). The ability to find stable housing in the first month following release, having a job six months after release, and a positive attitude about postrelease challenges (i.e., those who thought it would be easy to stay out of prison after release) were some of the strongest inhibitors of reincarceration. Those who reported a postrelease violation one month out and

**Table 3. Predictors of Self-Reported Arrest One Year after Release**

Those who had...	Those who had...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• served a longer sentence</li> <li>• close partner relationships while in prison</li> <li>• been on parole immediately after release</li> <li>• required telephone contact with their PO</li> <li>• received treatment or medication for a health condition six months after release</li> <li>• used drugs frequently before prison</li> </ul> <p><b>...were less likely to be rearrested.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• spent time in a juvenile detention facility</li> <li>• problems due to drinking before prison</li> <li>• positive attitudes toward parole officer</li> <li>• lived with someone who abuses drugs or alcohol since release</li> </ul> <p><b>...were more likely to be rearrested.</b></p>

**Table 4. Predictors of Reincarceration One Year after Release**

Those who had...	Those who had...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• secured long-term housing</li> <li>• expected it to be easy to stay out of prison</li> <li>• a job six months after release</li> <li>• used drugs frequently before incarceration</li> </ul> <p><b>...were less likely to be reincarcerated.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• violated a parole condition immediately after release</li> <li>• been on parole six months after release</li> </ul> <p><b>...were more likely to be reincarcerated.</b></p>

those who were on parole six months out were more likely to have been reincarcerated within their first year after release—this finding might reflect other attributes of these men (e.g., criminal career severity).<sup>10</sup>

### Summary and Policy Implications

This report is the fifth and final product of the *Returning Home* study in Ohio. The report summarized the experiences of prisoners returning to the Cleveland area spanning over twelve months following release. Important factors associated with reintegration success and failure include obtaining employment, close contact with supportive family, parole supervision conditions, stable housing, and abstaining from drug use.

Securing stable housing proved a significant challenge for many men in the study. A year after release, nearly half considered their housing situation to be temporary, and many were still dependent on a parent or sibling for their housing needs. The importance of finding a stable residence cannot be overestimated: men who found such housing within the first month after release were less likely to return to prison during that first year out. Further, living in a setting without negative influences such as drug or alcohol abusers proved crucial to avoiding rearrest. Services that enable former prisoners to secure positive and stable housing immediately after release could yield positive results for those released, as well as for the general public.

Families also played a large role in the reentry process. Especially after release, many former prisoners relied heavily on their families for emotional and tangible support. In fact, family support was the most frequently cited reason why men believed they had been able to stay out of prison—this was true one month, six months, and one year after release. As evidence of the protective nature of family relationships, having a helpful family increased the likelihood of employment and close attachment to children decreased the likelihood of substance use (among returning fathers). Families can also, however, negatively affect reintegration when they have their own problems with crime and substance abuse. Men who reported such negative family influences were more likely to use drugs frequently one year out. To incorporate families effectively into the reentry process, both the positive and negative aspects of family involvement should be factored into reentry programming.

In support of previous research, returning prisoners' relationships with their intimate partners increased their chances for reentry success. Men who felt closest to their partners while in prison were less likely to report being rearrested. Close partner relationships after release from prison also increased the likelihood of employment one year out. Encouraging and easing partner visitation during incarceration may help preserve and enhance prisoners' feelings of closeness with their partner. The provision of relationship and marriage support services, during and after prison, may also

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strengthen partnership bonds that could, in turn, increase the support available to former prisoners.

Health status also appeared to influence reintegration success. One year out, over half of the men reported a physical health condition, nearly one-third were diagnosed with depression, and one-fifth exhibited signs of PTSD. These health conditions inhibited men's ability to obtain employment: those with a physical health condition or depression six months after release were less likely to have a job after a year. On the other hand, for returning prisoners suffering from a chronic physical or mental health condition, receiving medication and treatment for their illness appeared to decrease the likelihood of rearrest one year following release. Considering that nearly three-quarters had no health coverage a year after release, their ability to obtain much-needed services was questionable. Assisting returning prisoners in obtaining health insurance, especially those diagnosed with physical and mental health problems in prison, could help them get the medical attention they need and increase their chances of success after release.

Obtaining employment and financial independence were two of the most important factors in the reentry experience. After a year out, about half of the men were employed, but only 37 percent were employed full-time, with an average salary of \$10 per hour. Incarceration's impact on employment and wages was substantial, with very few men achieving the job stability and wage levels that they had experienced prior to incarceration. Many former prisoners relied on other sources of financial support, including "under the table" work, support from family and friends, public assistance, and illegal activities. A few predictors of success in finding employment included having a prison job and having supportive family. Former prisoners returning to the Cleveland area clearly need substantial assistance in finding and maintaining employment.

Released prisoners' attitudes and beliefs, particularly their readiness and ability to change, influenced their reentry experiences. Over three-quarters of men in the study anticipated that it would be easy to stay out of prison, renew relationships with family, and be socially accepted once released, and these positive attitudes remained consistently high after release. Most men also reported giving up the friends and

hangouts that got them into trouble. Such attitudes appeared to influence prisoners' abilities to change. Men who thought it would be easy to stay out of prison were less likely to be reincarcerated and to report frequent drug use one year after release. Conversely, men who admitted intentions to commit crimes and use drugs once released were more likely to do so, as illustrated by a higher prevalence of frequent drug use one year out. Prerelease programs that address prisoners' readiness and willingness to change could enhance their chances of success.

Substance use also has a major impact on reintegration. After release, drug use and alcohol intoxication among the men in the study increased over time, with recent use reaching 35 percent after a year out. The proportion of users reporting problems associated with drug use also gradually increased from 22 to 28 percent. Substance use immediately following release, as well as frequent drug use after six months, were predictive of continued drug use a year after release. Additionally, for men who had returned to prison, drug use was cited most often as the reason for their return. Not surprisingly, many prisoners are in need of substance abuse treatment before and after release.

Returning prisoners often seek out programs and services to increase their chances for reentry success. To illustrate this point, over a third of the men attended basic education courses while incarcerated and those men who succeeded in earning their GED in prison were more likely to be employed a year out. Additionally, about two-thirds received services in the year after release, and such participation appeared to increase reentry success. Men who obtained substance abuse treatment immediately after release were less likely to report frequent drug use after one year out. Encouraging and aiding prisoners in obtaining needed service before and after release can help improve reentry outcomes.

Upon release, the majority of men in the study were placed on a period of supervision. Most parolees perceived their supervision officers as helpful, though this proportion decreased slightly over the year following release. By one year out, over half of the men were still on supervision, and 42 percent of those men admitted to violating at least one condition. Various aspects of supervision appeared to influence reentry success and failure. Men

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required to maintain telephone contact with their parole officer were less likely to report frequent drug use after release or rearrest. Parole conditions requiring employment also increased the likelihood of employment after one year out. The risk of reincarceration was greater for those on supervision and for those who reported parole violations shortly after release. Supervised men were also more likely to report frequent drug use a year after release.

Ultimately, reentry success is most commonly measured by former prisoners' abilities to refrain from future criminal activity. Over a year after release, nearly a third of the men in the study reported committing a crime (typically drug possession and dealing), 40 percent reported being rearrested, and 15 percent were officially returned to prison. For those who returned to prison, when asked the main reason for their reincarceration, the top reasons noted in addition to drug use were failing to avoid people and situations that could get them into trouble, not having enough money to support themselves, and unemployment.

This report is intended to provide a foundation for policymakers and practitioners as they consider options for improving reintegration among released prisoners returning to Cleveland and similar communities. Listening to the experiences of these former Ohio prisoners should help point the way to policy innovations that are empirically grounded, pragmatic, and reflective of the realities of reentry.

## Notes

1. The protective relationship between in-prison counseling and substance use one month postrelease was not replicated when we examined the predictors of frequent drug use one year after release.
2. Scores of 16 and above on the Center for Epidemiologic Studies depression scale were considered to indicate a high likelihood of depression (details available upon request).
3. Items measuring PTSD symptoms were adapted from a validated 17-item PTSD symptom scale (details available upon request). Scale items correspond to the DSM-III-R diagnostic criteria for PTSD.
4. Self-reported crime and arrest figures were calculated based on responses from any of the postrelease interviews. These figures likely underestimate the prevalence of crime and arrest of men for whom we do not have data for the entire year after release.
5. Reported reasons for reincarceration are only available for men who returned to prison within a year after release and who completed a postrelease interview while incarcerated. Responses from men who were reincarcerated in a jail only were excluded from the analysis.
6. Three other factors (wanted financial support, owing debt, and being on supervision) were significant at 0.10 in the weighted or unweighted model but not in both; thus, their effects are not discussed.
7. Two other factors (prerelease spirituality and taking medications for a health condition after release) had effects significant at 0.10 only after weights were applied and are thus not discussed.
8. Although supervised men with a positive attitude toward their PO were more likely to report rearrest, official ODRC records indicated that they had a lower rate of return to prison. Thus, it is possible that the rearrest finding captured these prisoners' increased willingness to *admit* rearrest.
9. The observed effect of age at release, significant at 0.05, failed to retain significance when weights were applied. Additionally, giving up friends and/or hangouts that got men into trouble was only a significant predictor with the application of weights. These discrepant findings are not discussed.
10. Preprison employment was only a significant predictor after weights were applied; thus, the effect is not discussed.
11. Time between release and the final postrelease interview was excluded as a control measure from the official reincarceration model because the follow-up period was set at one year. For the employment model, preprison education level was also included as a control variable.

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- Watson, Jamie, Amy L. Solomon, and Jeremy Travis. 2004. "A Portrait of Prisoner Reentry in Texas." Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.
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### **Returning Home Study Methodology**

The *Returning Home* study was implemented in four states, including a pilot study in Maryland and full studies in Illinois, Ohio, and Texas. The goal in each state was to collect information on the life circumstances of respondents immediately prior to and following their release from prison, as well as up to a year into their reintegration in the community. Each study involved surveys and interviews that explored various reentry expectations, needs, and experiences, such as those related to prerelease preparation, postrelease housing and employment, and the renewal of personal relationships.

The study design in Ohio was composed of several data collection efforts. The first effort involved 424 male prisoners sentenced to at least one year in prison who were returning to Cuyahoga County and entailed (1) a self-administered survey given to groups of prisoners about one month prior to release and (2) three one-on-one interviews with sample members conducted approximately one month, six months, and one year (14 months) after release. The second effort consisted of a series of focus groups with community residents in the Cleveland neighborhoods that received the highest proportion of returning prisoners, as well as one-on-one interviews with reentry policymakers and practitioners in Cleveland. Data in this research brief come from the self-administered prerelease surveys of 424 prisoners (administered from May 2004 through March 2005) and the three postrelease interviews conducted with 358, 322, and 294 released prisoners, respectively, throughout the first year following release.

Descriptive analyses included the entire prerelease sample of 424 respondents where data were available. Eighty-four percent of the 424 men (N = 358) were reinterviewed one month after release, 76 percent (N = 322) were reinterviewed six months out, and 69 percent (N = 294) were reinterviewed about one year out (average of 14 months). A total of 260 respondents (61 percent) completed all three postrelease interviews. As noted shortly, when corrections for attrition bias were addressed using weights, the analysis results remained largely comparable. Thus, only unweighted results are presented in this brief.

To predict reintegration success and failure one year after release regarding employment, substance use, and recidivism, we used multivariate logistic regression on the 260 men who completed the prerelease and all three postrelease interviews. All predictive analyses statistically controlled for respondents' age, race, marital status, employment history, preprison drug use, criminal history, supervision status, and time between release and the third postrelease interview.<sup>11</sup> Relationships reported as significant are those found to be statistically significant in multivariate models at a probability equal to or less than 0.10.

To ensure that our predictive analysis findings, based on the sample of 260 participants, were generalizable to the larger group of participants at each survey wave, as well

as to the original sample of 424 prerelease participants, we compared the samples on a variety of reentry domains. First, we examined the reentry experiences of the sub-sample of men who completed every interview (n = 260) and compared them to the experiences of all men who participated at any of the survey waves. We found these groups to be nearly identical in every domain, including residential mobility, family support and relationship quality, partner relationship quality, financial obligations and support, attitudes and beliefs, reintegration difficulties, and postrelease programming. Similar trends over time also emerged for neighborhood disorder, attachment to children, employment, substance use, parole violations, and reincarceration, although slight percentage differences (usually favoring the subsample) were noted between the two groups. Second, to increase the comparability of the predictive analysis findings to the entire sample of prerelease participants, we computed weights using a wide range of measures from the prerelease interview. We analyzed each of our multivariate models with and without weights and detected very few differences. Only those factors significant with and without the application of weights are reported as significant predictors of reentry success and failure one year after release. Discrepant findings are footnoted.

### Prior Reports

The first phase of the *Ohio Returning Home* study involved analyzing data collected by the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction to describe incarceration and reentry trends and characteristics in the state. Findings were reported in “A Portrait of Prisoner Reentry in Ohio.”

The second phase involved interviewing male prisoners returning to the Cleveland area, once before and three times after release. Two research briefs describe their prerelease expectations and immediate postrelease experiences: “Ohio Prisoners’ Reflections on Returning Home” and “Cleveland Prisoners’ Experiences Returning Home.”

In addition, *Returning Home* researchers held focus groups with residents of three Cleveland communities with the highest concentrations of returning prisoners and completed interviews with Cleveland policymakers and practitioners. See “Community Residents’ Perceptions of Prisoner Reentry in Selected Cleveland Neighborhoods” and “Cleveland Stakeholders’ Perceptions of Prisoner Reentry”.

All reports are available on the Urban Institute web site: <http://www.urban.org>.

### About the Authors

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### Acknowledgments

We would like to thank many individuals for their contributions to this research project. The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, especially Edward Rhine and Steve Van Dine, generously provided time and valuable information. Special thanks also go to Research Support Services, under the direction of Dr. Alisu Schoua-Glusberg, for conducting the pre- and postrelease interviews. Production of this report was also made possible through the team efforts of a number of researchers in the Urban Institute’s Justice Policy Center, including Rebecca Naser, the project director for the *Returning Home* study in Ohio, and Jennifer Yahner and Avinash Bhati, who assisted with data analysis. The *Returning Home* study in Ohio is funded by the generous support of the George Gund Foundation, Health Foundation of Greater Cincinnati, Cleveland Foundation, Smith Richardson Foundation, Annie E. Casey Foundation, Ohio Office of Criminal Justice Services, and the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction.



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