

## **RICHLAND COUNTY MODEL REENTRY COURT**

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*For the last five years, Richland County, Ohio, has operated one of the first, and largest, model reentry courts, which provides for court oversight of offenders as they proceed through the criminal-justice system.*

### **The Reentry-Court Concept**

Traditionally, the involvement of the criminal court with the offender ends following incarceration—at least, until the offender returns home, usually on parole, and commits a new crime. A reentry court, however, maintains active oversight of an offender regardless of custody status; plans for the offender's release; and sets goals for and remains involved with the offender during probation or parole.

In September 1999 the U.S. Department of Justice called for concept papers on the idea of establishing a reentry court that would manage the transition of offenders from prison to their communities. Basically, the Justice Department recognized that courts and judges have no role in the broad array of activities that carry out the terms of a sentence, prepare offenders for release, and help offenders with the transition back into their communities as productive citizens. A reentry court asks judges to play a more active role in ensuring that offenders carry out the terms of sentence both during and following release from prison. This nontraditional view began with the therapeutic-jurisprudence concept, as implemented most notably in the drug-court movement.

The Richland County Reentry Court Model was one of the most comprehensive of the original nine sites selected in working with other criminal-justice entities and offenders.<sup>1</sup> This model targeted all adult felony offenders sentenced to prison from Richland County and returned to their communities as reentry participants. Reentry planning began at sentencing with the implementation of “reentry plans” that followed the offenders to the institution. The court continued oversight by monitoring the offenders' adjustment and program participation during

incarceration and evaluating their eligibility for release to probation or parole, at which time a variety of services and specialized supervision programs would be put in place.

### **Reentry Court Requires Partnerships**

The program itself consists of a partnership with the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections and Adult Parole Authority (state government, executive branch) and Richland County legal, social services, law enforcement, and probation, led by the Richland Common Pleas Court (local government, judicial branch). The partnership members agreed to work together and in some cases modify each other's authority to develop a successful system of planned offender reentry into the community.<sup>2</sup> This partnership bridged the gaps in the justice system, as offenders moved from one entity to the other, by focusing on what each partner could do to implement and expedite offenders' reentry plans to ensure a smooth and seamless transition back into their communities, thereby increasing the offenders' chances for success.

Supervision required that county and state conditions of release be standardized to make compliance easier to measure and enforce. This resulted in the Enhanced Supervision Agreement, which, in turn, made enforcement and supervision compliance easier to verify and enforce with local law enforcement. A partnership between Richland County law-enforcement agencies and municipal, county, and state probation and parole (Richland County Community Policing, Probation, Parole Partnership Program) was incorporated to monitor supervision compliance and to maintain supervision-adjustment data on all reentry offender participants.

### **Core Elements of the Reentry-Court Program**

**Offender assessment and planning** begins at sentencing by identifying an offender's needs for treatment and behavioral adjustment, as well as restorative-justice obligations. Before release, a planning team, along with the judge, parole-board member, or both, identifies an offender's needs and supervision issues and adjusts and finalizes the reentry plan.

**Active offender oversight** includes specialized supervision and a monthly review with the offender and the judge, parole-board member, or both (joint authority) for the first year of release.



**Accountability to the community** ensures that the offender makes a concerted effort to address restorative-justice issues, such as restitution to the victim and community.

**Graduated and parsimonious sanctions** are established for violations of the conditions of release that can be swiftly, predictably, and universally applied.

**Access to an array of support services** includes substance-abuse treatment, job training and employment, education, social services, family intervention, and housing services through both local government and private resources.

**Positive judicial reinforcement** is applied through monthly review with the offender of progress with the judge, parole-board member, or both, which encourages continued positive adjustment, recognizes success, and rewards completion with graduation recognition.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> For more information please contact the Richland County Court Web site at: [www.richlandcounty.courtservices.com](http://www.richlandcounty.courtservices.com) at Programs, Richland County Reentry Court.

<sup>2</sup> That is, the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction/Adult Parole Authority allow the judge to take oversight of a reentry offender out on parole. The judge, working with a member of the parole board, can recommend a sanction or revocation of the offender's parole to the parole board for implementation.