REPORT FROM THE MISSISSIPPI REENTRY COUNCIL

The Mississippi Reentry Council was established by the Mississippi Legislature and its legal status became effective March 29, 2015. The establishing legislation was Miss. Code Ann. §47-7-111. The purpose of the Council is to create effective strategies to assist former inmates in their return to the general population, reduce recidivism rates of inmates, increase public safety, and reduce budgetary restraints presently created by prison related costs. The Reentry Council is led by a Steering Committee consisting of twelve members who serve for two year terms. The current Steering Committee members are as follows:

a. Mike Hurst, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Mississippi

b. Pelicia Hall, Commissioner of Corrections

c. Jim Hood, Attorney General

d. Reverend Don Gann, Pastor First Baptist Church of Oxford (faith based representative)

e. Mark Quarles, Chief United States Probation Officer for the Southern District of Mississippi

f. Keith Starrett, U.S. District Judge for the Southern District of Mississippi

g. Presiding Justice Jim Kitchens, Mississippi Supreme Court

h. Diana Mikula, Executive Director of the Mississippi Department of Mental Health

i. Drew Snyder, Executive Director of the Mississippi Division of Medicaid

j. Steve Pickett, Parole Board Chairman

k. Roy Dixon, Ex-Offender

l. Robin Stewart, Mississippi Department of Employment Security

PROCESS USED BY COUNCIL IN CONDUCTING BUSINESS

While the Reentry Council consists of a twelve person Steering Committee there are over one hundred people who have requested to participate in the meetings. The Steering Committee is the official body that votes, but the Steering Committee receives input from other interested parties and in fact solicits suggestions from the general public.

On the 18th of January 2019, the Council met to consider recommendations for the 2019 term of the Mississippi Legislature. Following motions, seconds, discussions and votes by the Steering Committee the Reentry Council recommends to the Mississippi Legislature that the following proposals be adopted by the Mississippi Legislature.

I. Governor Phil Bryant has submitted a criminal justice package which is set forth in House Bill No. 1352. Mr. J.W. Ledbetter made the presentation to the Council and after hearing the presentation the Council broke out in applause. Several of the Governor's proposals have been discussed and promoted by the Reentry Council for years. They are summarized as follows to wit:

1. Expanding, renaming and promoting the Intervention Courts and including Mental Health Courts in Mississippi. They are currently called Drug Courts but the Bill proposes expanding the different types of special purpose courts in Mississippi.

2. To remove the offense of contempt for failure to pay a fine or fee, or failure to respond to a summons or citation relating to a traffic violation as grounds for revoking a person's driver's license and to remove the requirement that a person's driver's license be suspended for a controlled substance violation that is unrelated to the operating of a motor vehicle.

3. To revise the eligibility for expungement of the record for certain offenses.

4. To provide that an occupational licensing board shall not automatically bar an individual from obtaining a license because of a conviction for a non-violent crime that occurred more than three years before the application for such license.

5. To authorize tax credits for employer taxpayers that employ a person that has been convicted of a felony offense which is not a crime of violence as specified in the law.

6. To create the "Programs To Reduce Recidivism Fund" which is the fund that will take documented savings from Criminal Justice Reform and prison reform and place them in said fund to be used in reentry programs in the communities. (This is the intent of HB585)

Following Mr. Ledbetter's presentation the Council enthusiastically recommended that all of the Governor's proposals be adopted.

II. That the Smart Start program and cognitive behavioral programs that are in the penal institutions be expanded, tracked and data kept on the success of said programs with the goal that each inmate would complete Smart Start and a cognitive behavioral modification program prior to leaving the institution.

III. That Reentry Courts be developed in our State.

IV. That day reporting centers be developed and utilized in lieu of incarceration in certain instances.

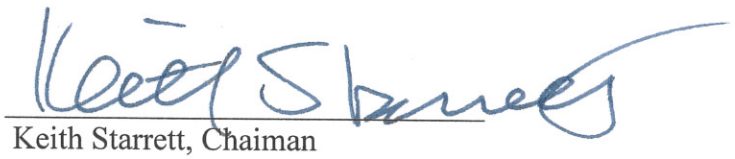
V. That the prisoner uniform changes proposed by the Commissioner of Corrections in the DOC's legislation proposals be adopted. Prisoner reentry begins at arrest and every facet of the trip through the system affects outcomes. The current uniforms reinforce thoughts that inmates can't do any better and the research supports this change.

VI. That there be an expansion of transitional housing beds and add at least 155 additional beds.

The above proposals were unanimously adopted by the Reentry Council Steering Committee, and it is recommended by the Council that the Legislature adopt the above described proposals.

Respectfully submitted,

MISSISSIPPI REENTRY COUNCIL



Keith Starrett, Chaiman