



City of Baltimore

OFFICE OF RETURNING CITIZENS ANNUAL REPORT

Prepared by Stefanie Mavronis, Director, MONSE

2024



BRANDON M. SCOTT
MAYOR



INTRODUCTION

In August 2023, Councilman James Torrence introduced legislation that would establish an Office of Returning Citizens. The legislation was passed by the City Council in Spring 2024 and signed into law by Mayor Scott on April 24, 2024. Recognizing the critical need for a coordinated re-entry strategy, this legislation positioned MONSE as the lead agency to drive re-entry efforts in Baltimore, ensuring accountability, alignment, and equity in support of returning citizens. While this ordinance was passed without a corresponding fiscal note, provision of local re-entry services has continued throughout 2024, with a focus on foundation-building, convening key stakeholders on re-entry issues, and advancing the City of Baltimore’s re-entry goals.

ACTIVITIES OF THE OFFICE AND THE COUNCIL

Staffing

With the ordinance being signed into law, MONSE's existing Re-Entry infrastructure was absorbed into the Office of Returning Citizens. The team consists of two staff members funded by ARPA: the Chief of Community Engagement and Opportunity and the Re-Entry Coordinator. MONSE will work with the administration to bring these employees into the General Fund during calendar year 2025.

Programming

In Spring 2023, MONSE launched the Returning Citizens Behind the Wall (RCBTW) initiative with funding from the American Rescue Plan Act. RCBTW is designed to connect Baltimoreans who will soon be re-entering society within 18 months of release with meaningful employment and skills training while they are still incarcerated, and wraparound support before and upon their return, so that they are able to successfully re-enter society.

The RCBTW model is unique among work release programs in three ways. Participation in RCBTW means:

1. Participants are guaranteed to be compensated at \$15+ per hour compared to the \$2.75 that incarcerated individuals eligible for work release typically earn.
2. A portion of the participant's earned pay will be withheld and set aside on their behalf. Upon release, participants are then issued a check for these saved earnings.
3. Participants are automatically connected to case management with the Mayor's Office of Employment Development (MOED) and MONSE teams to create safe return plans, facilitating a smoother transition back into society.
 - a. A safe return plan evaluates and addresses needs for successful re-entry on an individual basis, and may include a plan for some or all of the following services:
 - i. Housing
 - ii. Post-release employment
 - iii. Mental health support
 - iv. Locating vital documents
 - v. Substance abuse treatment
 - vi. Peer support

In 2024, the Office of Returning Citizens established a strong working partnership with the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS), participated in regular behind-the-walls visits, and began developing safe return plans. 135 total clients were served, with 118 participating in Returning Citizens Behind the Wall and 119 receiving Safe Return Plans. Two individuals were housed in 2024 using the first funds from the FY25 PJRA award. More were to follow in 2025 and will be included in the next annual report.

RCBTW post-release outcomes for 2024 are limited, given that a large amount of the participating population remained incarcerated through the end of the year. There are some early success stories that suggest the strength of the RCBTW model. For example, a participant named McCoy successfully worked in the RCBTW program while incarcerated; upon release, MONSE's reentry team matched him with both housing and employment. This initiative will continue through the end of FY25, when American Rescue Plan Act dollars are expended. Future funding of this program has not yet been identified.

Partnerships

With approximately 2,000 Baltimoreans returning from prison each year, MONSE is committed to fostering a seamless and supportive transition for returning citizens to reduce recidivism and promote their successful reintegration into society. MONSE collaborates with Maryland Department of Public Safety & Correctional Services (DPSCS), City agencies, and community-based re-entry partners to coordinate support for returning citizens. This collaborative effort aims to streamline the services and expand access to critical resources.

DPSCS and the Mayor's Office of Employment Development (MOED) play key roles in the Returning Citizens Behind the Wall initiative. DPSCS partners with the MONSE team to identify candidates for the RCBTW program and allows the MONSE team to go behind the wall to directly recruit and engage participants at both the Baltimore City Correctional Center and the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women. In coordination with MOED, safe return planning began in January 2024 with RCBTW participants. MONSE is working to expand case management to all individuals returning home to Baltimore City from incarceration through the Office of Returning Citizens.

UMB EMBRACE

MONSE partners with the University of Maryland Baltimore's EMBRACE Center to send over referrals for services. A representative from EMBRACE also attends Re-Entry Action Council (RAC) meetings, detailed below. In 2024, MONSE provided grant funding to support a portion of the Center's outreach work in and around Lexington Market.

Grant Funding

MONSE was the recipient of the FY25 Performance Incentive Grant Fund (PIGF) PJRA award through the Governor's Office of Crime, Prevention, and Policy. The agency was awarded \$278,250.00 to support an innovative transitional housing initiative to benefit newly returning citizens across Baltimore City. Working in collaboration with the Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC), the Mayor's Office of Homeless Services (MOHS), and other trusted community partners, it is estimated that the amount of funding would provide up to 37 returning citizens with a security deposit and six months of rent. The program ensures that participating individuals are released from incarceration with a viable path toward safe, affordable accommodation. Without secure housing, newly released individuals are often at much greater risk of homelessness, recidivism, and exposure to various cycles of trauma that can threaten one's long-term success in the community. Outcomes achieved through this funding will be detailed in the 2025 Annual Report.

CONVENING OF RE-ENTRY ACTION COUNCIL

The Re-entry Action Council (RAC) is responsible for assisting government agencies and community-based organizations around re-entry services in Baltimore, including but not limited to: strengths-based case management; access to effective workforce development training and programming; work readiness; addressing barriers to housing; family reunification; and connectivity to holistic healthcare services including mental and behavioral health, substance use disorders, and co-occurring disorders. While the RAC is not yet formally appointed, it does convene bi-monthly. MONSE is anticipating that the first appointments will be finalized by the end of 2025.

The RAC informally has been attended by a wide variety of individuals from organizations such as Catholic Charities, New Life Recovery, the Maryland Office of Public Defender, Safe Streets, PIVOT, the PEACE Team, the Circuit Court for Baltimore City, and more. Members should represent those with lived experience, those in positions of power to effectuate change, and those who deeply understand the returning citizen population.

SPECIFIC POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS TO PROMOTE THE GENERAL WELFARE, EMPOWERMENT, AND REINTEGRATION OF BALTIMORE’S RETURNING CITIZENS

Upon the RAC’s confirmation, proposals for policy and legislation that will be explored include the right to housing for people returning home, requiring safe return planning for all people returning home from incarceration to Baltimore City, and creating specific mandates for women returning home from incarceration.

In reviewing best practices, we understand that effective reentry programming begins behind the wall, well before release. The RAC will also explore ideas on how to build stronger programs within the system to facilitate successful reentry and reintegration into society for our participating population. Staff buy-in in participating facilities is vital for success. The RAC might explore how to create better training opportunities for correctional officers and other DPSCS staffers. Other areas of focus might center around job readiness, education, transportation, life coaching, expungement opportunities, and reforming policies on when and how vital documents are obtained.



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