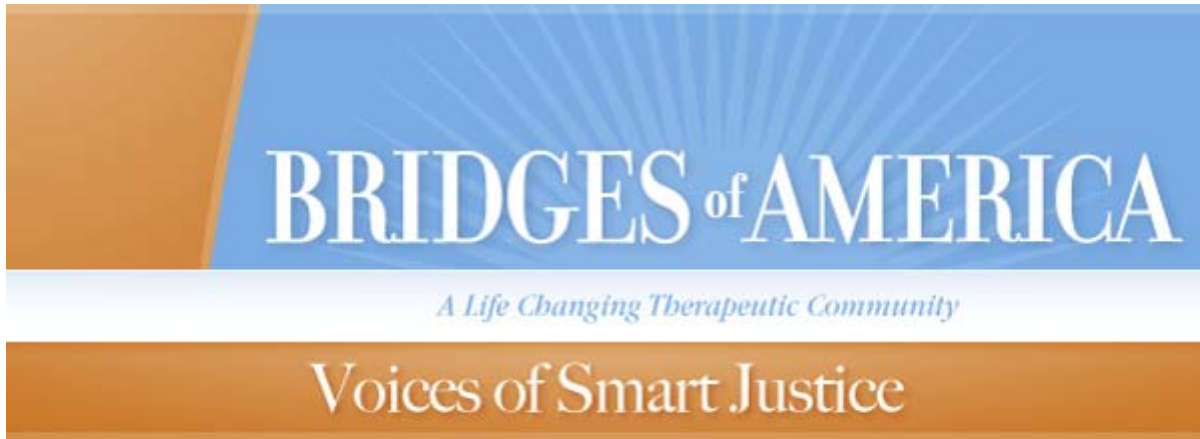


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May 2014

Now that the 2014 session of the Florida Legislature has concluded, I wanted to take a moment to update you on issues that will impact the work that we do. I'm happy to say that the impacts we will feel are all positive.



The best news is that both houses passed HB 53 and SB274, commonly known as the Inmate Reentry Bill. When this bill becomes law, every inmate released from a Florida prison will possess a state-issued Driver's License or State Identification Card. This will enable them to gain employment, secure housing, fill prescriptions and have an identity upon which to become self-sufficient and rebuild their lives. This bill also encourages the Department of Corrections to expand faith-based prisons, because we know statistically that these are safer prisons and that the outcomes are better.

At its very core, this is a public safety issue. We believe in holding felons accountable for their crimes, but are also very aware that more than 30,000 inmates are released from Florida's prisons every year. We want released inmates to be successful in rejoining society so that future crimes can be avoided - and future victims are spared. We can help change and ex-felon's path by helping him or her to get an education, job skills and by treating their underlying issues of substance abuse mental

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I am optimistic that an eight-year quest for this legislation is nearing success, and I extend my thanks to Rep. Dennis Baxley, Rep. Charlie Stone, Sen. David Simmons and all legislative leadership for supporting these common-sense solutions that will help bring crime down in our communities. Now, we await the Governor's signature that will make this important legislation into law.

Gov. Rick Scott has made it clear that he understands the importance of reentry initiatives as they directly and positively impact recidivism, and that he is committed to treatment for offenders with substance abuse issues, including diversion from prison and treatment while in prison. He has championed this kind of legislation from his first year in office.

I would also like to commend the men and women in law enforcement across Florida. They work to keep our state's citizens and visitors safe day and night. It is our hope that through decreased recidivism - and the Department of Corrections recidivism numbers are thankfully going down - we can reduce criminals and reduce crime. Further, representatives of law enforcement organizations have been essential in getting the Inmate Reentry bill moved through the legislature.

In addition to the Inmate Reentry bill, the Minimum Mandatory Sentencing for Drug Offense (SB 360), which was sponsored by Representatives Katie Edwards (D-Sunrise) and David Hood (R-Daytona Beach) and Senators Rob Bradley (R-Fleming Island) and Greg Evers (R-Pensacola), will impact future participants in transition and work release programs. Further, the Governor has recommended additional funding in his budget that will provide for an increase in drug diversion beds, and the opening two treatment prisons in Baker and Everglades counties for 432 inmates each.

All of these reforms will make a dramatic difference in reducing crime through reducing criminals, and making Florida a safe place to live, work and raise a family.

This is what Smart Justice is all about: holding criminals accountable for their actions while instituting intelligent policies that will produce outcomes taxpayers deserve: saving tax dollars and a low crime rates.

\$50 Registration; 6 CEU's

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Sincerely,

Lei Costantino Brown
President and CEO

www.bridgesofamerica.com

Bridges of America is a nonprofit organization founded in 1972 with the mission of changing criminal behavior through a practical, comprehensive approach that includes intensive substance-abuse counseling, parenting classes and work-release programs. Bridges' core value is a belief that people can change.

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