

- Welcome everybody. So I'm Roger Jarjoura. I am a senior advisor at the National Reentry Resource Center, and welcome to our webinar today, "Lessons Learned from Reentry coordinators: Overcoming Challenges in the Field". Just a brief notice to you that this is, this webinar is being recorded. And it will be made available on demand in about a month. And so if you let others know about this, they'll be able to go and find the recording and view it themselves. You will, during the webinar only have, if you have any questions, you can put those in, we have Q&A that you can put it in or in the chat. You won't have the option to come off mute or turn on your video. All right, let me... We're gonna start first. So I'm gonna introduce John Bae. John is a program manager with Vera's Open Doors to Public Housing initiative and a visiting second chance fellow with the Bureau of Justice Assistance, with experience in the criminal legal system. As a Second Chance Fellow, he is lending his expertise on the barriers to reentry after incarceration to inform national policies and practices aimed at systems reform. John has also worked on the Second Chance Pell Grant program and helped build out the Opening Doors project at Vera. He's been engaged in philanthropy work during which he was a philanthropic advisor for the Art for Justice fund and a program director at Public Welfare Foundation. Previously, John worked as a program coordinator for College Initiative, where he led a team to provide resources and support in higher education for justice involved students. He was also a Pinkerton Community Fellow at the Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services, providing support for program participants in college. John holds a BA and an MA in criminal justice from CUNY, John Jay College of Criminal Justice. And I'm gonna turn it over to him now to kick off our event.

- So much Roger and good afternoon, and thank you for giving me the opportunity to introduce myself. My name is John Bae. One of the two Second Chance fellows with the Bureau of Justice Assistance at the US Department of Justice. I'm really looking forward to today's discussion and hearing lessons from the field about how we can improve reentry outcomes and delivery of services. Second Chance Month recognizes the importance of helping people transition safely and successfully to the community after incarceration. I think we all know that it takes all of us to make that happen. From the person reentering the community to their families, service providers, parole, corrections. To sum it up, it all takes a village. But this village is often not absent challenges, and to overcome the hurdles and barriers towards successful reintegration, it takes collaboration and shared learning. Now this past month, we've heard from different stakeholders working along various points of the criminal justice system continuum on strategies to support system impacted people. Those lessons, as well as other information will continue to strengthen reentry practices and policies. For example, you may have seen a request from our partners at the Council of State Governments Justice Center to complete a questionnaire on reentry housing. As we all know, housing is a critical, but often unmet need for people leaving incarceration.

It's the information that you as reentry coordinators will share that will contribute to better supports for people in reentry who are housing unstable or being released into homelessness. Once again, thank you for giving me the chance to introduce myself. I really look forward to today's discussion and to working with you all in the future. Roger, I'll turn it back to you.

- Thanks so much, John. Okay, Let me tell you a little bit about our format here today. So we've got a great panel for you here. Four reentry coordinators who are gonna be talking about the role of the reentry coordinator, and challenges, and what they're looking forward to coming up in the future. So the format is gonna be, I've got, we've agreed on a set of five sort of broad questions that I'm gonna walk them through. Each round is a single question and we'll give each of them a chance to respond. They'll have just a few minutes to do that. And so after we go through the five rounds, then we will take any questions that have come in and we will spend time letting our panel respond to those questions. So let me, I'm gonna give each of them a chance to introduce themselves to you with our first question, but let me just tell you who our panelists are, and then we invite them to come onto onto the camera. So we've got Vanessa Martin, who's the director in the reentry division and the Office of Diversion and Reentry, Los Angeles county. Janice Weiss is the reentry program manager for the Alaska Department of Corrections. LaShetta Wilder is the director of pre-release reentry, Mississippi Department of Corrections, and Elizabeth Dixon-Coleman is the statewide reentry administrator for the Nevada Department of Corrections. So welcome to our panelists here. And we're gonna start with a question where we, I'm gonna ask each of you to tell us about your role as the reentry coordinator. And just to remind, So you got three minutes here to tell us what you want us to know about you and your role. And let's go in order, alphabetic order by jurisdiction. So let's start with Janice.

- Okay, sure. So yes, Janice Weiss from the great state of Alaska. My role as the reentry program manager may be a little different from some of the other 49 states reentry coordinator positions in that I oversee reentry for a state, we have 14 institutions in Alaska. so I oversee reentry in the state, but I also oversee the education and vocational training programs for those 14 institutions. So my role is to, well, basically, when you're the 49th state, you don't have everything already put all together. So we didn't have a reentry unit a few years ago. And so now we do have a reentry unit. So my role was to build that unit and then to work with my staff and with the rest of DOC and the rest of the state to see what we wanted to do with reentry and how we wanted this reentry unit to work with all of our partners.

- Okay. Thank you. So let's go to Los Angeles next, Vanessa.

- Thank you. First I wanna thank everyone for inviting me to be part of this panel. So thanks BJA for not only inviting me, but for hosting

this, I feel like the more we can continue to lift up and showcase the amazing work that's being done across the country and really support each other in this work, is always a valuable experience. So thank you again for the opportunity to talk about and lift up the amazing work that we're doing in LA County. I stand on very big shoulders of my team and the community and the board of supervisors who has helped us create this work in Los Angeles. So I am, again, the director of reentry for LA County. I'm housed within the Office of Diversion and Reentry, which was created by the board of supervisors in 2015 in an effort to divert people with mental health and substance use disorders out of county jail and into community based treatment. So the focus of our work has always been very much focused on continuing to support the community based work that's been going on for decades. And I was brought into this work in, I was hired in November of 2017 to lead the reentry work. And the reentry division is quite large in terms of the scope and the scale of the people we're serving. It's not just those with severe mental illness or substance use. We're serving people with mild to moderate mental health or substance use disorder, people coming out of our county jails, as well as those on probation and those coming home from state prison back to LA County on parole. So we're a massive, massive system. We have currently about 10,000, 11,000 people in just in our county jails alone. We have about 30,000 people, 40,000 people on adult felony probation. And thousands of thousands of others returning home from state prison to LA County, about third of the prison population returns home to LA County a year. So I, we really, our work, again, really being focused on putting, bringing the power back to the communities that have been impacted by systemic racism and the criminal legal system. I don't know if I should keep going on about myself or if you wanna move on, Roger, to others. But I can talk a little bit more about my role.

- Yeah, well let's let the others introduce themselves and then we can circle back through.

- [Vanessa] Great.

- So how about, so let's go to Mississippi, LaShetta. Looks like you're on mute.

- My apologies. Good afternoon. I am LaShetta Wilder with the Mississippi Department of Corrections and I am the director of reentry and pre-release services and as of last week, I now take over educational services, just as Ms. Janice Weiss is doing. So that is new to my own morale, So I have a lot to learn, Ms. Weiss, I'm sure you'll be able to give me some of your knowledge and expertise as well. But I've been working in this reentry area since 2016. And it has been an experimental journey in working with that, but we do have 22 facilities across the state of Mississippi to include our private, regional and state facilities, and also our community work centers. Our goal for the Mississippi Department of Corrections through reentry

is to be able to provide services and networking to our offenders. Educational services, to be able to allow them to go out into the community to become sustainable, employed, because our goal is to focus on employment as well. Once we bring them through those programs. And not just bringing them through programs, but also providing them access to services and resources throughout their incarceration. Our goal also for not just for the offenders, but for the staff within the department of corrections, is to be able to help them to realize where reentry truly starts. And it doesn't start within that 30 to 60 days of release or the three to six months of release. It starts at the day that offender is arrested. And also, once they come into the incarceration process on your compounds, at your facilities, to be able to give them the knowledge of how important their roles play, even though they're not a reentry coordinator or providing that actual reentry service to those offenders, but how important their roles are in allowing us to be able to do what we need to do to provide those services as well.

- Okay. Thanks so much. All right. And then Elizabeth.

- [Elizabeth] Hello, this is Elizabeth Dickson-Coleman. I'm from Las Vegas, Nevada. Representing the state of Nevada and the Nevada Department of Corrections. I came to our department back in 2016, 17 with the SR grant, which was carried through, and our sustainability factor has taken us into community corrections and partnering with our community partners, our managed care organizations, as well as utilizing our higher education funding pieces to make sure that as our residents are entering society, that they're continuing to be trained, and to find viable jobs and sustainability in going forward. In my stint here with Nevada Department of Corrections, I am coming to the end as I will be retiring in August. However, in continuing that with the statewide reentry administrator running the entire state, that we've actually come out of our 81st session with some major changes in sustainability law for obtaining identification and workforce development, training, et cetera, through all of our community partners. And so what we're looking forward to going into, what I kindly giggle and laugh to, to be the 21st century, as corrections is sometimes behind in many of the things that we do. But I'm looking forward to sharing some of our happiness and some of our continued things that we continue to not say no to. And any way I can help to further develop anything that we're doing with our department.

- Okay. Thanks. So that's a nice segue. So why don't we go into that now. Let's talk about, what do you feel like has been the recent impact of your work and what do you hope that you're gonna accomplish in the near future? And if we can keep the same order going. So, Janice, do you wanna kick us off?

- Sure, of course. Okay. So what is the impact and what do I want to see in the future? So the impact, I think, well, DOC, or Alaska DOC

had a reentry manager prior to me who was just helping to get things rolling and who was the person who actually applied for the first Second Chance Act grant through BJA that we received. And then she left and then I was hired in 2018, or 2019, sorry, to start the reentry unit. And that was thanks to the Second Chance Act grant. Because one of the deliverables in that grant was to start a unit. So we've built our unit up now to nine staff members. And just in Anchorage, but obviously we serve statewide. And our positions are all state funded, except for one, is funded through a different grant. Otherwise they're all state funded. So the sustainability part is there for continuing on. But I think what it really did, by building a reentry unit through the department of corrections, is it helped to bring things together statewide. So any kind of reentry program, anybody offering reentry services, as well as recovery services, because a lot of that population are folks who have been justice involved. But with DOC kind of serving as the hub of that wheel, it has helped to bring people together in our state. So that cliché that goes around now, working in silos. So we're not really working in silos now. With DOC as the hub, we're able to partner with all the people around us. And so that's my vision is to continue to build on that partnership with the different state organizations and the different community organizations so that we have a concise uniform program throughout our state.

- Great. Thanks. Vanessa, over to you.

- Great. Yeah, so, similar to a lot of what Elizabeth just talked about. We have been very fortunate in the past few years, again, with the board of supervisor of LA County creating our office. And actually just recently passing a new motion by the board of supervisors to create an entirely new department within LA County called the Justice Care and Opportunities department. So we're very, very excited about the new department, it'll be the first of its kind that will focus specifically on people who have been involved in the criminal legal system. So we're really thrilled about this and this will hopefully, the goal of this new department, as Elizabeth was alluding to, and mentioning earlier about all the different silos across our work will help to consolidate and bring all these silos together and in a real integrated fashion. So there are a lot of different criminal justice reform initiatives happening within LA County right now. But not housed under the same roof, so this will give us an opportunity to do that, we're very excited about that. And I will say that we're just in a really, really important time. And I constantly focus on how important this time is and how we really have to take advantage of the reform movement that's happening right now. Because we might not have this opportunity forever. And so while we have the opportunity, while we have funding, we have state funding through proposition 47, which was a voter approved ballot measure that passed in 2014 to lower, to reduce lower level offenses, property, and drug crimes to misdemeanors. So that has brought some savings back to the state, and

that's passed through to jurisdictions to provide community based services, as well as funding through the probation department through Senate bill 678, which has reduced revocations per probation, revocations back to the state. So those are both state savings that are now passed through to the jurisdictions and come through us to administer services for the communities that have been impacted. So we've been very fortunate to create a number of different initiatives, as I mentioned, our scale is very, very large in LA County, larger than most states. And because of that, and because of the various needs of the individuals we're serving, we've created an entire portfolio of programs. Our key initiatives are reentry intensive case management services. The crux of that model is working with community health workers. So these are people with lived experience. Often known as or referred to as peer navigators or credible messengers who really act as mentors and work with their clients on a kind of whatever it takes approach to help them access services. We also have a community reentry center called DOORS, which stands for "Developing Opportunities and Offering Reentry Solutions." Again, first of its kind in Los Angeles. And it brings together community based organizations and county agencies into one location, so it's kind of a one stop shop that provides a wide array of services from employment to legal services, to arts and healing, to education and employment. And most recently we've launched a sector based employment and training program called SECTOR. It stands for "Skills and Experience for the Careers of Tomorrow". And that we are very fortunate again, to work with community based organizations to provide employment and training programs. And the goal of that is to, the goal of all of our work, obviously, is to reduce recidivism and help individuals move towards family sustaining wages. So we're really excited about the kind of key initiatives that we started, we're also grateful to have a recently awarded BJA grant that we are using to help us develop programming for women in reentry, which is definitely a sorely needed service. A lot again, has kind of worked with most of our community based organizations that have been doing this work for a long time, so we're happy to be able to help support all of that work and really focus on the women in reentry, which is unfortunately an increasing proportion of our women coming out of our county jails. And I would say our impact, we're really proud of the numbers. Since we've launched, as I mentioned, I started, built this work when I came on board in November of 2017. And our first program, the RICMS program launched in April of 2018. And since then we've served 35,000 people in our programs. So really proud of the work that we're doing in LA County. And I know it's a lot of information, so I'll put my email address and website in the chat at some point, so people can refer back, 'cause all of this information is on our website.

- Thanks so much. LaShetta, turn it over to you.

- Okay. What's the most recent impact of the work that I've done working with, or I'll say my team has done, 'cause it takes more than

just myself to get this work done that we are doing. And what do I hope to accomplish in doing all this? In 2014, House Bill 585 was passed in Mississippi, and it focused on bringing forth reentry efforts for the state of Mississippi, which was kind of new and it's still evolving in our state. There are a lot of changes that we still need to make and legislative changes and changes within our correctional institutions as well. However, through my role and my team of work that we do here, we've been able to expand a lot of our programming throughout the state of Mississippi. With our new commissioner, which is commissioner Burl Cain from Louisiana, and I'm sure you all know him from Angola in Louisiana. We have been more so focused on providing the job skills training for our offenders, or our inmates that are currently incarcerated. What we do is trying to give them those job skills, life skills training, so when they start, when they are returning back to the community, they have the skills to be able to get the employment that they need to provide for their families. We do have reentry programs in all of our facilities, pre-release programs that have pre-release counselors and reentry specialists that work with our offenders that are preparing for release. What we do is provide them those services and access to services through partnerships with other agencies across the state. With House Bill 585, it did provide the task, the reentry task force, as well as the reentry council, which brought about my position. So I'm the second person to serve in this position. And I've been here, like I said before, since 2016. But through those partners, like with the Department of Employment Security, through the Department of Medicaid, Social Security Administration, as well as the Department of Public Safety and many other entities, we're able to provide those services within the facilities before those offenders are getting ready to be released from incarceration. Through the department of employment security, we have built a database where they're able to go in and start navigating the system to see what employment is out there for them. They're able to register in the system with the Department of Employment Security. We're also able to provide them access with certain benefits, such as social security benefits before they're leaving, preparing them to be able to provide for themselves if they're unable to work prior to incarceration. But one of the new initiatives that our commissioner is working on is being able to get our offenders or our inmates certified to become inmate instructors while they're incarcerated. They go through all of the vocational programming while they're incarcerated, and we don't just focus on offenders that are actually getting ready to go home, but we do focus on a lot of our long term offenders that can receive the training to be able to assist other offenders in their units, to come into what they're doing, to be able to train them, to go out and work, not to start getting their skills working throughout the compound, throughout the facilities, getting that experience and instructing and for us to be able to provide those vocational trainings with the assistance of the inmates themselves, 'cause who could better provide, the true access to that than those that have are going through that same

experience as they are? But some of the programs that we do focus on, such as automotive mechanics and small engine repair, diesel mechanics, welding, a cosmetology program for our offenders, life skills programming for our offenders as well. But in this program, the offenders, they are under the supervision of vocational, of the vocational directors within the facilities. But they do get that assistance from the inmates. Additionally, with that, we provide counselors through our pre-release programs and our reentry programs. And through those pre-release counselors and reentry coordinators, we provide the wraparound services and access to the individuals that are going back out into the community. What we would like to see in the future is for our individuals to be able to go out into the communities employed. And we're not talking about just those jobs where you can go to the, just your small jobs. We want them to be able to go out and get a sustainable living wage to be able to support themselves and their families. And what a better way to do that than to provide them not only just the access to resources and the life skills training, but also access to these vocational skills and vocational training programs that we provide them. However, once we do provide them those training skills, we want them to be able to know how to keep those jobs. So we do take them through the training to be able to do resume writing, interview skills. We take them through all of that. So when they do get out into the workforce, they know how to communicate with others. They know how to interview. Especially with the background that they have and being able to answer the questions that come across to them, 'cause it will come up if they mark that yes on their job applications. So we try to teach them how to be able to better communicate with that target on their back, and focusing on what it is that they're supposed to be doing once they get out into the community. My overall goal, and I would say as a personal goal for me to be able to do is to set up our offenders to have access, to get those interviews while they're incarcerated, so they can go out of the door and walk directly into a job in their communities. And I see that helping not just that individual, but it also helps our communities, it helps the employers, and it benefits the families. Because that family member doesn't have to take care of that individual coming home, sitting on the couch and waiting on him to take the next step when we've already provided that access prior to him getting out into the community. So it's a win-win situation for all of us.

- That sounds great. Okay. Elizabeth, how about you?

- [Elizabeth] So Nevada Department of Corrections has done similar programs to what has already been discussed. However, one of the major things that we've done over the past five years in which reentry has been built in the state of Nevada is that we've partnered with our community partners, our managed care organizations, et cetera, to do, what we say, reach from the inside out. So they come in pre-release. In the pre-release, we looked at many of the laws which were preventing our residents from obtaining sustainable wage jobs, getting



their ID, et cetera. And what could we do to make sure that that happens before they leave? We worked on changing the laws, AB236, which was actually based upon some of the national reform of the First Step Act. It has enabled us to, yeah, actually apply for everything from driver's license, birth certificates and Medicaid up to 12 months prior to release. So that it's in place. So then we can start in with, not only with our behavior trainings, through our programming and sustainability, but bringing our community partners to run classes, to teach them soft skill development and pre workforce conditioning on how to speak to an employer, how to carry themselves in a workplace, as well as then also their skills training. Looking at skills tracks that they need, and the skills tracks that we found in through COVID that has been utilized. There's tons of pieces that have to deal with their ability to turn around and utilize their educational pieces in which they obtain in the Nevada Department of Corrections to go forward in working within our casino industry. With that, front of the house and back of the house partnerships, we've actually partnered with one of our national providers, Hope for Prisoners and they have WIOA funding, So that they've looked at, what are sustainable pieces within a business industry in which they can support individuals going forward within the entertainment divisions and how can that be utilized to be something other than just a typing skill or just a dishwasher. And looking at a career path and not just looking at a job to get them out, to make an hourly wage, but how can they turn those hourly wage jobs into a long term career in partnering with major corporations, such as Caesar's International or locally, stations, casinos. And also our partnerships within the construction industry. Working with major partners here that have come into Nevada. Tesla as well as Amazon, on how can we do tracking, and how can we prepare our residents to come out, to have the ability to maintain those jobs and continue those jobs when they leave? The other major piece that I will say that over the years that we've actually had some major wins with is again, the access to healthcare, and the wraparound services components for what our residents need, often when they're leaving. Whether it be for substance use and abuse prevention, as well as medical needs in which they're leaving. That's been one of our major wins that we've went forward with. And especially in making sure that everyone upon pre-release has the eligibility criterias to be considered at least to put in their application for Medicaid, to make sure that they have some of those pieces, as well as private managed care organization components based upon their workplace needs. But if they do accept a job or they have a job, as soon as they walk out of the doors, do they have medical insurance based upon that as well as a living wage to go forward? So those have been the major things that I think we've worked on. Again, time, and us not saying no when doors are closed and continuing to say, okay, if we can't do it, who can we get with us? And I think that the major work on having our legislators and our governor's office and our assembly folks throughout our state to be involved in these processes ahead of time, taking them on tours and talking, actually have created some super successful pathways to

have us reach all those goals.

- Okay, great. Yeah, very impressive developments from all the sites. Great. Okay, so then let's think about, what are your biggest challenges? Specifically in your jurisdiction. And what resources, could be federal, state, local, philanthropic, would make the biggest difference for your jurisdiction? And we can keep the same rotation going here, Janice.

- Okay, sure. So the biggest challenges that we face, and this is like living on the cusp of the pandemic, because we had all those challenges prior to COVID. Then we had the COVID challenges for two years, and now we're kind of slowly making adjustments for the COVID challenges and coming out of it. So the challenges are starting now to resemble pre-COVID, rather than the COVID. But I think one of the challenges that we will always have, as you know, and everybody talked about the great programs that they have in the institutions and getting people prepared for re-entry and then what they can do to be successful after they leave the institutions. But one of the challenges I think will always exist is how do we motivate people to get them to sign up for the programs in the first place? So we too say the same thing that reentry starts, either upon arrest or when they first walk through the doors. And generally when they have a sentence to work from. And then work all the way through their stay within our institutions and then, so pre-release and then post-release. But when we look at the pool of people who would be eligible to do some of the vocational training, some of the education, some of the preparation work, as well as all the treatment programs that I'm sure everyone else has to. Sex offender treatment, the substance misuse treatment, other things. The whole thing is how do we get people to sign up for those, to be involved in them, and to complete them? Many times legislators will ask us, well, can't you just make them? And no. We can't. We can't just make them go to class, get a GED, go to treatment. We cannot do that. So that's something that we're working on within our state and with the different organizations that work with reentry. And then I think your question was what would make the biggest difference for our jurisdiction? Well, the funding that we have, I feel very fortunate in our state because we have state funding for reentry, and for most of our programming, we have that state funding. We rely on some grants that come through the Department of Education, through the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, and then of course, BJA as well. So what would make the biggest difference? Okay, so I haven't used any numbers, so I'll use a number now. Within the state of Alaska, 14% of our population are Alaska native or American Indian, but within our institutions, the number of people incarcerated who are Alaska native, American Indian is 40%. So we go from 14% to 40%. So one of the things that would make the biggest difference for us would be the ability and the knowledge to address through cultural relevant programming, how we can make a difference in the lives of these 40%, of the people who are

incarcerated with us. I think that would be one thing I would look for. And that's all I have. That's it for me.

- Okay. Okay, thanks so much. Yeah, Vanessa.

- Yeah, great. Yeah, and I really appreciate everything Elizabeth and Janice and Latisha have been saying. It's all resonating very much with me. Yeah, I would say, kind of on a macro level, take it macro and micro. So on a macro level, I would say that our funding is our biggest challenge. So I mentioned earlier having access to prop 47, which is awarded to us through a competitive solicitation process that we're currently working on right now, our cohort three grant proposal is due next Monday, so it's consuming a lot of my brain right now. and SB 678 funding that flows through probation. We're fortunate to have those, that funding, but prop 47 funding is limited. Especially given the scale of the individuals we are charged and want to be serving in LA County. And SB 678 is limited to those who are on adult felony probation. So while we have some of that state funding, it's been very beneficial to us. What keeps me up at night is the funding. And we've recently passed, through a voter, again, another voter approved ballot measure, Measure J, which stood for measure justice. In LA County, this was passed into 2020 to reallocate 10% of the county's budget to community based services. And so we're actively working on that, making sure that the funding is truly reallocated to the community based organizations and to this work that we're doing. So while we're happy to have that, it's still not necessarily at the scale that we need. Again, very, very, fortunate to have the BJA grant, again, that will help us provide programming for women. So I think on a macro level it's funding that keeps me awake at night. The other thing that really is a huge area of focus is kind of the backlash to all of the effective reform work that we've done to reduce recidivism and make our communities safer and stronger. As we all know, I'm sure, media loves sensationalizing these anecdotal cases, but kind of rarely focuses on the stats, and most of the people who are benefiting from our services, these everyday stories of people transforming their lives for the better are not necessarily what generates interest from the media. So there's been a lot of reform in LA County and California in particular in the last decade or so, but there is concern about backlash on some of these things. And I think, if it were up to me, talking about resources, everyone kind of has touched on this, but really making sure that resources are appropriately and equity reallocated to ensure that, again, the evidence based and the community led services that we are supporting are adequately and sustainably funded. I think sustainability and the equitability of the work that we're doing is of paramount concern, ensuring that the work is there for the long run. Although, I like to jokingly say that I would like to put myself out of a job. So, the goal is to get to a point where we really have really helped people become their best selves, transform their lives, gotten them on paths to careers that are sustainable and have a living wage, especially here in LA County.

And that we reduce recidivism and make our communities safer. The big three, in terms of macro level of three services. We have our huge housing crisis, as everyone knows and hears about constantly, I'm sure. LA County, while we're trying our best to work on this, it's still, it's a very challenging issue to grapple with and to really make an impact in. So not surprisingly the housing crisis is impacting everyone. And of course, disproportionately people who are low income, people who have been involved in the criminal legal system are even more so impacted by this. We saw this again, as well as with COVID. These groups that are always disproportionately impacted or even more so when these crises happen. Employment, which everyone has touched on. And while we've been fortunate to create the SECTOR program using Prop 47 funding, and focusing on high growth sectors. So that's a big area of focus on ours is really trying to make a dent in industries like IT and advanced manufacturing and green jobs, which are huge, so we have a lot of training programs around that. There's still a lot to be done. And Elizabeth focused on this, you really touched on an important point around employer engagement. That's hugely critical is to focus on the employers. And so we've been able to do a bit of that work. But that's, to me, another area that needs a lot of focus is if we're really going to create career pathways that are meaningful, create sustainable wages and family sustaining wages that we really need to focus on engaging the employers. And I would say lastly, a lot of what's been touched on around engagement. I really appreciate everything Janice says around engagement. Our scale is huge, I mentioned earlier that we serve, have served 35,000 people and while that's great and impressive and really proud of that, that we've been able to enroll people, it's really getting them to stay engaged in services and complete the trainings that we have, complete the programs, follow through on their care plans that they create with their community health workers. And so these are areas that are things that we are, very, very much focused on. Another major partnership that we've been grateful for, but again, wanting to see greater collaboration and more emphasis on this is that pre to post release handoff. So there's a lot of talk about warm handoff, and what that looks like. But ensuring that that's actually possible. One of the challenges we've faced in LA County is having our community health workers, again, these are, majority of whom have lived experience of incarceration and that feel very, very critical to the role, that experience, but not necessarily being able to have the release and the approval to be able to go into the jails and engage with individuals prior to release. So that has been something that's a policy issue that we're focusing on on a local level. And I think also just to highlight again, the Medicaid coverage. When people lose their Medicaid coverage when they're incarcerated, that's another thing that we're focused on and that California is actually moving towards ensuring that people once incarcerated don't lose their Medicaid coverage, and doesn't have that turned off so quickly. So I could go on for days, but I don't wanna take up too much time.

- Thanks, Vanessa. Okay, LaShetta.

- Okay, so, like they both have mentioned before, there are many challenges that we could cover today, from housing to medical coverage and all of that. They're all important factors the list could go on and on. But one of our biggest challenges in the state of Mississippi is, like they said, it starts with funding. One of the biggest concerns for us, and one of the biggest issues for us in the Department of Corrections here in Mississippi is there are a lot of mandates that are out there that they expect the Department of Corrections to provide and within the institutions, but there's no funding for it. So we have to go out and seek sources and resources from other entities. A lot of the grants that we do apply for us the same, a lot of our programs as well. And we also work a lot with our community colleges and our universities to be able to bring their services inside of the facilities with no cost to us. Their staff are willing to come in and instruct our individuals, whether it's virtual or starting back now to become in person. Also, like you mentioned before, Medicaid. We do provide, to suspension of our Medicaid services for our offenders when they do come into incarceration. But we also provide that access for them to be able to apply for those Medicaid services once they're released, prior to their release, back into the communities. We also provide SNAP benefits, which is our food assistance program within our facilities to help us with some of those challenges, because we would like to give those offenders access to be able to feed themselves once they get out. And through that program that we have, they also give them access to the food pantries, clothing, different things of that nature. But without those resources and working with our housing providers that we connect with, we wouldn't be able to do that in our facilities. One of our other challenges that we face is, I'll go back to housing. That I think one of you all mentioned before. One of our biggest housing issues is for our offenders, sex offenders. I know that's a big issue across many states. So I know I'm not alone in saying this. And it could be your smaller states, as well as your larger states that have this issue. That there are barriers that are up just alone for that group of individuals. So we have a lot of hard, we have a lot of issues placing those individuals back into the community with sustainable housing. Because there are a lot of, they can't be within so many feet of a church or school, or different things of that nature to be able to give them that access. But we do provide, we do connect with other sources, housing providers that we contract with in the state of Mississippi that provides housing for our individuals that lack that when it's time for them to get ready to go home. So that is available, and we appreciate their assistance in working with us to be able to do that as well. What keeps me up at night is making sure that, part of our jobs is to be able to reduce the recidivism rate. When I turn on the TV, I don't want to see Mississippi always as the top three in the highest incarceration rate. So as part of my job, and I know you all face the same heat as I do in staying out of that top three. But that

is one of the things that'll keep me up at night is trying to make sure that through our programs that we're providing inside of the facilities are doing what we want them to do, that we're giving that handoff to the community once we provide those services to them in the institutions. Connecting with our probation and parole officers. Connecting with the community correction services to make sure, okay, this is what this offender has been provided with. Once they've been incarcerated, okay, what can we do to work together once that offender is out in the community to be able to continue those services when they're out? So building those partnerships, those relationships with our community service, community corrections staff, as well as our community partners, and continuing the services, providing those wraparound services throughout the state, too, that's one of the, if it was up to me, that's one of the things that we would provide across the state. I've heard both of you ladies talk about, and I think all of you to include Elizabeth as well, talk about you all providing the reentry centers across the state. That is one of the things that we do not do here in Mississippi, and I know that is one of the goals of our current commissioner is to be able to provide those reentry network services through centers throughout the state. We do have community work centers where our offenders that are still incarcerated are able to go out into the community and work and bring in income as well. But we wanna be able to continue that services across the state, in our communities, especially those that lack the resources, or where it's harder for offenders to be able to have access to services. So being able to have those follow up services available to those individuals in area, community, across the state, whether it's continuity of care, or continuum of care, with those offenders through medical services. Mental health services is definitely a huge issue for all of us because we know what leads to that can lead to other issues as well, such as our drug issues that we're having in our communities. But being able to provide those supportive services, the appropriate supportive services for those offenders. And I mean, all of us coming together, lifting those individuals up and our communities realizing that it's not just the responsibility of the Department of Corrections to be able to provide that assistance. It takes every individual. If they're coming back to your community, it something that you can take a part in to be able to help that individual do better. I mean, it's something that we all have to play a part in, not just the Department of Corrections. So those are some of the things that I would like to see in the future across the state of Mississippi is everybody understanding what their roles are in providing reentry services for those going back into their communities.

- Thanks LaShetta. Elizabeth, turn it over to you.

- [Elizabeth] Well, I think I have to say again, budget, budget, budget, budget, budget. And as many have already said, not only do we face budget issues, but we face actual, I guess, logistical issues. In the state of Nevada we're similar to Alaska. I know when I say that

people will be like, no, you're not, we have snow or, no, you're hot as fire down there. But within our areas, we have large populated areas. We have two. Reno, Carson City, and Las Vegas, Nevada. People think that's our entire state. However, it's not. We have two major metropolises, yes. But then we have rural areas. So how do we get the funding and the information and the same resources out to our prisons, 'cause there's 17 of them throughout our state, not two. One in each area, north and south. They happen to be literally located in the north and the south. But then how do we also convince communities to engage in that? And unfortunately with Nevada, one of our biggest challenges is we do not have 100% percent direct allocation to corrections for reentry. We have to submit a budget every year, ask, beg, prove, and say what we need, and then in most cases we've been able to continue some of our sustainability by the grace of BJA and CJI and some other forces. WIOA funding. So some of the 17 pots, WIOA funding that's come through. Our workforce avenues as well as the Department of Energy with some of their work's sustainability is to say, yes, grants are great, but we can't guarantee money from time to time, so we need to change. If we can prove that we can do it in a grant, we need our legislators and our state, and our community partners to back us in saying, okay, we'll fund this to a point where we can have some of the sustainability factor of, we're not always constantly fighting for money. I will say one of our other biggest challenges is as many strides as we've made working with our community partners and us all trying to, as state agencies, to try and carry out this same message together. In the state of Nevada, our parole and probation division is not part of Nevada Department of Corrections. They are two distinctly different agencies. And so making sure that we are not fighting one against the other as we're making policy changes and law in Nevada, so that we incarcerate people on small pieces of what people would say is a violation, where it could be a teachable moment, or a moment in which a community partner could intervene through some managed care organization, support services, et cetera, rather than putting them back down in prison for three years, because they didn't make a good choice and show up for the drug test on time. They did test negative and they didn't have any drugs, but they didn't show up on time. So let's put 'em back in prison. And I think that that's our biggest challenge is paralleling and making sure that the policy that we change within the Nevada Department of Corrections is not siloed to what fits us, but we're looking at the global picture of what fits the entire state. How does it affect Alamo, Nevada, population 400 as the same that it impacts 4.6 million people in Las Vegas proper? And so making sure that we're looking at those things, I think that's the stuff that keeps us up late at night. And I will say to you though, we've had many successes. Our successes come, usually we take two steps forward to take six backwards. But learning to not say no, and learning to continue to reach out and to show the story of, rehabilitation takes time. Change takes time. And to show how those things are research based. That yes, if we do programming, then violence in prison is reduced, so thus, if people come out and have

viable jobs and they have sustainable living wages where they're not having to work three or four jobs to support a family, and not sleep, et cetera, as opposed to turning to a criminal lifestyle of hardly working and making millions of dollars. If we can show our communities how valuable that is, then that's part of our message. And I think that that's been our biggest success, but also our biggest challenge at the same time. Excuse me, is continuing to make sure that that message is positive in every aspect that we do. Whether it be talking to the general public, whether it be talking to families, which are reunifying with their own family members. And saying, don't necessarily not support them when they come out and providing the support services for the families to reconnect also. Because in order to reintegrate, they have to have both sides of the fence.

- Yeah. Thanks so much. So we've got, the questions are piling up coming in from the audience. So I'm just gonna have you just take two more minutes each and just, we're gonna, it's our final question from me. So in addition to what you've already said, what could other jurisdictions learn from your work? What advice do you have for others?

- I bet I'm first. Okay, so I'll move us right along. Okay, so what advice would I have for others about our work? Well, first of all, just quickly say it's been comforting to hear from the other places talk about the work that they're doing, because it tells me that even though we're new, we're on the right track, we are doing so much of the same type of work that the others are doing. So I'm happy to hear that part of it. what I would recommend that other places do. And it's kind of like a two parter. So one is, I know there are strategic plans all over the place for departments of corrections, for the states, strategic planning, for all kinds of things. One of the things that I would like to accomplish between now and next year is to have our own reentry unit strategic plan. And our reentry unit is a part of the health and rehabilitative services division for the Department of Corrections. And so that could be, some of their services like treatment and things could be included as well. But I'd really like a strategic plan so that we are moving forward strategically. There are so many things that need to be done. When people talk about Medicare, social security, getting people their driver's license. Making sure they have some kind of insurance, getting a job, family reunification. There's just so many areas, and it's like, overwhelming sometimes, if you put bubbles outta your head, you'd be like floating in the sky because there's just so many bubbles up there. So a strategic plan would help me sleep better at night because I would know where I was going and whether or not I was making progress in getting there. And then another thing is just that the pandemic really brought home is the use of the internet. And anytime you bring up the internet and prison, you're like, getting funny looks from people, especially folks who aren't involved in the criminal justice system at all. So one of the people in our state put this really well. The internet should be



used to bring things to the inmates, not to give the inmates internet access, but rather using the internet to bring things to them, like education, health information, visits with their family, whatever it might be. But bringing that in, in obviously a safe and secure way. So those are two things I would go away with is one, a strategic plan that includes partnerships. And, I guess it's only one. A strategic plan that includes partnerships with the other people in your state, and other states too, for that matter, who are working with reentry and make sure that that includes some form of having internet provided services.

- Okay, great, great.

- Vanessa.

- Great, that was very impressive, Elizabeth. You summed it up very well. So I had all these talking points around this last question here, but I wanna just say, very, very passionately, enthusiastically, and in the spirit of second chance that what other jurisdictions can learn is giving people second chances, right? And it's not just out of good will and compassion, which of course I'm a big proponent of, but also recognizing that the cost of incarceration is so significantly high. So to those who are very focused on the fiscal side, which I am, myself, making that argument, that the cost of incarceration is much higher than the services that we provide, and these services are actually been shown through evidence and decades of research to be effective. So I would say what other places can learn is not to give up. Keep fighting the good fight. And I so appreciate, Latisha. Sorry, LaShetta. You were saying around taking a village and not taking no. And it not just being the burden of one entity to do this work. The people we are serving are people who have paid their dues. If that's the kind of vein you're thinking about. And it's incumbent on all of us to support them. And again, these are very, very cost effective services. I think the other thing that's been trying for me, and I hear it in many of my colleagues who are here is that we know what works in reentry, right? I mean, we have a whole clearing house, a national clearing house of what works in reentry. This work isn't new. And I think so, the frustration I think you might hear in some of our voices that we have to keep fighting and proving ourselves through every grant and showing the effectiveness. And while that's of course important, and I'm very committed to rigorous evaluation of our work. These shouldn't just be a grant. We shouldn't have to live for every grant and live grant to grant. And it should be the local, state, federal government, that's really supporting these efforts if it really wants to see the transformation. And so the other question, really quickly is around, what's a pearl of wisdom I would say is really to build strong relationships with leaders in both the community, as well as local government, and to really create and lead teams of people who have experience, who have lived this work, who have been doing this work for a long time. Nothing really replaces

people who have been impacted by the system. And really listening to the input. And taking that input into the design and implementation of your programs. So in addition to the focus on evidence based practices, which is I think, something I'm very, very focused on, and ensuring that we're listening to the community and what perspectives and what work has been done in the community, and what are some of those defined practices that we can incorporate into this work. And I would just say, lastly, just to keep fighting the good fight, have faith and hope, 'cause it is very challenging and hard work. But that we really need people who have the passion and the commitment and the experience to keep leading this work and keep pushing on legislators and policy makers to make sure that the work that we have is again, sustainable and equitable.

- [Roger] Okay, thanks. LaShetta.

- I cannot say it enough about what it takes to learn this work or what can others do to learn it, learn what we do. Collaboration, communication, and community. They're the key factors in reentry planning and that process. Many of our individuals that are in the community and sometimes some of our individuals that are incarcerated, they don't know what's available to them during the incarceration process. They don't know how to communicate that with their families. The staff, they don't know. They don't go out and network with other departments within the facilities to find out what it is that it takes to be able to get through this, to get these individuals through the reentry process. It takes all of us to do the planning in it. We have to make sure that we're utilizing all of our resources that are out there. Like you mentioned before, Vanessa, don't take the word no. I know I've been in situations and trying to work with other agencies, even under the state of Mississippi, that our state agencies that don't wanna take the work to go through the hard work and the process to be able to work with us to get things done. But don't take no. Go before the legislature to get some of these things done. I know in the state of Mississippi right now, I see somebody mentioned about the driver's license. We work with our Department of Public Safety. They do come inside of our facilities. Is it hard? Yes it is. Was it hard to get there? Yes, it was. But not taking the answer no, now we provide provisional driver's license for our offenders, starting in July 1st of last year. So not taking the word, accepting the word, no, helped us to be able to get to some of the places that we are now. And utilizing those available resources, to be able to expand your programs. Working with those outside entities. Don't be afraid to go out and ask for funding. That's part of our job as reentry coordinators and reentry directors is to be able to, is to be able to bring in more money to the state, or to be able to bring in more funding, to be able to expand our services because we know these state agencies, we don't have it, so we all have to come together and see funding to be able to work together, to bring programs inside of our facilities. What is one thing that I'm doing that I think that someone

else could learn from this? And I'm gonna go back and take it to the staff in the facilities. Don't just leave it up to yourself as reentry directors or reentry coordinators to take on this feat yourself. Because it's hard. It is difficult to be able to take it all in and do it yourself. I rely a lot on the security officers within the facilities. My pre-release team and reentry team that's in and outside of the facilities. I work a lot with the community corrections reentry staffing. That's not under my umbrella, but working together with them, getting their ideas and utilizing their skills, to be able to get some of the things and help them work with you on writing grants and going out, seeking funding. Don't let them stay stuck in the facilities just doing one thing. Teach your staff how to go out and do what you're doing, how to go out into the community and learn what you doing. They also need to be able to learn the communities and the resources that are out there in the communities. I collaborate a lot with the community corrections staff, because they're all over the state. They're not in the institutions, but they go out into the communities, and if it's something that I need to know about a specific area, I'm in the central area of the state every day. So I don't get to get out, and my staff all over the state, they don't get to get out and go across the state. So we all come together where there's webinars or visiting the sites. Or we ask them to come in and visit our programs to see what we're doing and how they can help. We also allow them to come in and allow our officers to take part in some of the job fairs that we're doing, the reentry resource fairs that we're doing. We connect with the bureau of prisons in our state, in Yazoo, there's a federal prison. And we partner with them to be able to see, okay, what is it that you're doing that we can bring inside of our state institutions and how can we help you work together to improve your reentry efforts as well? And you have to be, you have to don't be afraid to be able to go out and get new ideas, seeking new ideas and bring them to your commissioner or your legislature. Talk to the right people. Because we can't help if we stay stuck in one area, in one position, and where we are. This area is continuously evolving. We're changing every day. There's something new that we can bring to reentry. And there's definitely other areas that we can reach out to that can assist our areas, and assist in this reentry area as well. We have to become more innovative as well as far, to be able to bring in those new ideas. And just don't stop. When you you complete one task. Or when you complete one goal, and when you see that the legislature has looked at something that you may have pushed forward, there's always something else that's there that you can do. So don't just look for one goal to reach. Once you reach that goal, don't stop. Continue to do it, because like I said before, our work is continuously evolving in reentry. It is a never ending, it is a never ending task. So we all have to come together to be able to make this, to be able to make this reentry process a success. So bring your experience and your knowledge. Don't leave it there, bring it out to other areas as well.

- Okay. So Elizabeth, so can I punt the first question to you maybe as

an alternative here?

- [Elizabeth] Sure.

- Okay. So this question comes in from Samuel in the DC area. What would each of you suggest to those of us involved in education and training is the most important aspect of reentry that returning citizens should plan and prepare for before they step out of the facility door to the community? And is it the same answer for juveniles as it is for adults?

- [Elizabeth] I don't believe it's the same for juveniles as it is for adults. Juveniles, and often cases will reenter into a system or a structure that will still support them due to their age. As for adults, I will say, making sure that a realistic picture is painted as to teaching an individual on how to proactively explain who they are without lying about where they've been. And to speak a voice and a message of focusing in on what their rehabilitation path has been, and the positive accolades that they're going to bring back into a community. I think that's probably one of the biggest things we could teach them in education and programming is to be their own best advocate. But again, in doing that, we need to set the stage on our side to make sure that we teach individuals how to not lie about where they've been or what they've done. To be proactive with speaking their own story. And to make sure that they have the supports which fit their story, that they can add into a community. I think that's one of the biggest things that we've all kinda tippy toed around, but we haven't said it. We're asking people to reintegrate, but we also have to make sure that we're fully prepared to have them be honest about where they've been, because we're in a world of transparency with, unfortunately, the internet and things. And if we can dispel some of the negativity or some of the misconceptions about people, and redemption stories, I think is teaching our residents on how to sing the glory of their redemption without hiding or lying where their past has been, and utilize that in a positive way to access employment, housing, and then in most cases to re-acclimate themselves with friends and family in their community, 'cause that's where that support is. Be their own best advocates.

- Okay. Thanks so much. Well, so unfortunately we're at the end of our time here. So I want to take this opportunity to really thank our panelists here. One thing we often think about, the people working directly with people coming out of prison. That those, in many ways, they're heroes for them. But you guys are the heroes to the people who are doing that work and so thank you for all that you're doing, and thank you for your wisdom that you brought to this discussion today. There's quite a few questions that we didn't get to in the chat, so what we'll do is, we will work on, so one of our goals at the National Reentry Resource Center is to really create a community out of the coordinators across the United States. And so we'll get these

questions answered, and then back out to the field in the form of resources for you. So thanks everybody.

- [Janice] Thank you so much.

- [LaShetta] Thank you.

- Nice to meet you all.

- Roger, thank you to BJA. Bye. Nice to meet you all too!

- Yeah, yeah, it's good to know we're not alone.

- Exactly. Let's e-mail each other.

- [Elizabeth] Yes, thank you guys! It's nice to know there's a common voice with us all.

- [Margaret] Thank you, all.

- [Janice] Take care. Bye-bye.

- Bye.