

Many thanks to our contributors

SURJ would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to all of our members who contributed during our Annual Appeal in the fall of 2004. Because of your generosity, we are able to continue working towards smart reform of our criminal justice system and persist in our efforts to end mandatory minimum drug sentencing laws in this state. We hope we can count on your continued support in 2005.

Two New Opportunities to Volunteer Your Time

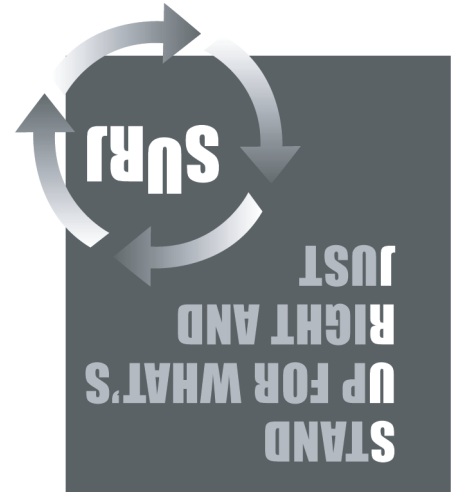
If research interests you...

A meaningful part of advocating for change in sentencing laws, drug treatment programs, and re-entry initiatives is finding real-life stories that show the current injustice of mandatory minimum drug sentencing laws, and the struggles and trials of those who re-enter community. You can help SURJ in this effort by reviewing secondary sources via the Internet, finding information in the library, or scanning magazines and newspapers and sending relevant articles to SURJ's office. We also need volunteers to help with interviews. Sound like something you could help with? Contact Dana at: dsorenson@surj.org.

If you are able to translate English into Spanish...

SURJ needs to keep the Spanish speaking community in the know about our activities and initiatives. If you would be interested in helping us translate our brochure, membership cards, and newsletters, we need you—whether you can help us once or on an ongoing basis. Dana is waiting to hear from you: dsorenson@surj.org.

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In The News

More Stand Ready for Repeal of Mandatory Minimum Drug Laws

According to SURJ's latest information, we know that nearly two-dozen state legislators are willing to sponsor our bill to repeal Delaware's mandatory minimum drug laws. In addition, we have collected the endorsements of 28 community and religious organizations for this important reform.

SURJ plans to introduce the bill this month, and we will let you know the bill number so you can work with us to encourage other legislators to support this much needed improvement to our criminal justice system.

Meanwhile, *The News Journal* published a terrific opinion-editorial on February 25th by attorney, and retired DuPont Vice President, Chuck Welch. Welch argues that, "...serious consideration should be given to repealing the mandatory sentencing provisions that relate to prisoners who are not violence-prone." He makes a strong case that repealing our mandatory minimum drug laws would help the state to focus its limited corrections resources on those violence-prone offenders who need to be imprisoned, rather than on non-violent drug offenders, who could be better served through more appropriate alternatives that include substance abuse treatment.

If you would like a copy of this editorial, please contact SURJ.

SURJ Goes on the Road Brings Current News to Kent and Sussex Counties About Substance Abuse and Incarceration

Despite severe weather during both downstate SURJ membership forums, the events attracted many familiar and new faces. The Sussex County membership meeting of February 16, 2005 and the Kent County meeting

"Mandatory minimum drug sentencing laws are the opposite of the process," said Phyllis Levitt, President of the ACLU of Delaware, "because they sentence citizens without looking at individual circumstances."



Featured presenter, Dr. William DeLauder, spoke to the group about his concerns about current criminal justice policies. "What can we do to maximize human potential?", he asked.

of February 25, 2005 (co-sponsored with the ACLU of Delaware and the League of Women Voters of Delaware) updated members about SURJ's efforts to repeal mandatory minimum drug sentences and featured experts who spoke about substance abuse treatment and re-entry programs, furthering the case for better use of alternatives for incarceration. We also explored the next steps needed to achieve our goals.

In Sussex County:

More than 30 SURJ members gathered at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Georgetown to hear the latest from SURJ. Reverend Earl Beshears of St. Paul's Episcopal Church welcomed everyone and spoke about the 25 years he worked in the Maryland Correctional system—for many of those years as a warden. Featured presenter William DeLauder, Ph.D., past President of Delaware State University, made a strong case for the repeal of mandatory minimum drug sentencing laws. Bruce Lorenz, the Director of Thresholds, Inc. spoke to the group about his experience working with drug offenders and how that work has changed over the years. Barbara Carter, the Director of The Way Home, explained how important it was to overcome the many barriers to successful reentry faced by newly released ex-offenders.

Josh Temple, Executive Director of SURJ, outlined the current problems of excessive corrections expenditures and prison crowding. He asked for the audience's support in making their legislators aware of these problems and the need for criminal justice reform. He did this again at the event in Kent County, held at the Delaware Public Archives Building in Dover.

In Kent County...

Ellen Wasfi, President of the League of Women Voters of Greater Dover, and Phyllis Levitt, President of the American Civil Liberties Union of Delaware, opened the "Smart Sentencing: Incarceration and Substance Abuse" forum by addressing why their organizations support SURJ's work and endorse SURJ's efforts to repeal mandatory minimum drug sentencing laws. Cathy McKay, President and CEO of Connections, CSP, Inc. talked about the proven effectiveness of substance abuse treatment in deterring crime, and the need for greater resource allocation to community based treatment programs. Marian Harris, Executive Director and Founder of the House of PRIDE, shared information about her organization and gave examples about why the House of PRIDE is so effective in helping offenders reenter the community.

For photos from these events, please visit www.surj.org.

SURJ would like to thank all of the presenters who shared their vision towards better and sounder criminal justice policies. Special thanks also goes to Corinne of St. Paul's Episcopal Church; Ellen Wasfi and Phyllis Levitt, for their role in organizing the Dover event; and the Delaware Public Archives Building staff, in particular Suzan Voshell.

SURJ member, Barbara Carter, helps ex-offenders find The Way Home in Georgetown — Successful Program Shows Amazing Results

The Way Home, incorporated in 1998, is small in size but big in results. With just a staff of two and volunteer base of approximately 40 people, the organization's impact on participants is profound. Its mentorship program, which pairs participants with community volunteers, has a hundred percent success rate for those who consistently meet with their mentors. So far, none of those participants has returned to jail.

Many of the participants have completed probation and are finally getting out of the system for the first time in their lives. Many have received educational degrees, have successfully reintegrated into society, and are now giving back to their communities and helping other ex-offenders with their transitions.

The Way Home at a glance:

- Provides three years of post-release case management.
- Meets with offenders referred by prison counselors or chaplains a few months before release.
- Greets participants at the prison gates with welcome baskets created by various church groups, and packages donated by local groups, providing clothing in the participant's size, toiletries, and organizational kits.
- Helps locate a bed in a homeless shelter, a church, or another facility upon release.
- Provides transportation to probation appointments, social services, and job searches.
- Sponsors on-going meetings that address a range of topics, from substance abuse to women's groups; they also sponsor ex-offender support groups.
- Connects participants with local educational facilities; Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous meetings, when appropriate.
- Assists participants in the process of re-connecting with their families.

Recently, The Way Home received a grant to expand their support services to include educational trips to such places as Washington, D.C.

"Something that I truly believe," says Carter, "is that we are all part of each other's liberation and healing. This healing comes in many unexpected ways. We are all on our "way home" on many and various levels. It is truly a blessing when we can encourage each other, affirm each other, and reach out our hand to fellow travelers on this journey toward deepening freedom, justice, and peace."

Barbara Carter invites everyone interested in The Way Home program to attend one of its quarterly community gatherings. The next potluck dinner ("Bring your favorite dish to pass, and your interest in our common work") will be held on April 27th at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Georgetown from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.



"What ex-offenders need to hear," says Carter, "is, 'Welcome back. We believe you have the chance to make it.'"

In a recent Joint Finance Committee budget hearing at Legislative Hall, Dwight Holden, Chairperson of the Board of Parole, spoke highly of The Way Home as a model re-entry program in this state.

What started out as a prison ministry group from St. Martha's Episcopal Church in Bethany Beach has blossomed into an impressive re-entry program that has helped hundreds of ex-offenders with their transition from prison to the community.