

### HB 443 continued from page 3

problem was the June passage of House Bill 443, sponsored by Rep. Dennis Williams (D-District 1). Thanks to HB 443, all Delaware police officers will now be required to undergo training to help them to identify symptoms of mental illness, mental disability, and/or physical disability and to respond appropriately to individuals who display these signs.

The passage of this bill is an important step toward helping Delaware's police to address the unique concerns of the mentally or physically ill and disabled. Lack of police training in responding to the unique needs of the mentally ill can result in an arrest for a minor infraction when a referral to a treatment option could be a viable, and more appropriate, alternative.

In Delaware, an alternative to arrest can include a referral to the Delaware Psychiatric Hospital. If a mentally ill or disabled person is arrested, Delaware's Mental Health Court can provide incarceration alternatives when the individual is diagnosed with an Axis I mental illness.

## Fortune Society CEO Speaks at Reentry Roundtable

JoAnne Page, President and CEO of The Fortune Society in New York City's West Harlem, presented a keynote address at the Reentry Roundtable on September 29, 2006. Staffed primarily by former prisoners, The Fortune Society's mission is to bring attention to criminal justice issues. The Society helps former prisoners and at-risk youth break the cycle of crime and incarceration through direct services, including a residence program for adults that is recognized by New York courts as an alternative to incarceration. The residence program, also called The Fortune Academy or "The Castle", provides housing and job training to former prisoners. With sixty current residents, the program boasts low costs and the lowest recidivism rate in the city.



*JoAnne Page, keynote speaker at The Delaware Reentry Roundtable.*

To read more about The Fortune Society's success, visit <http://www.fortunesociety.org/press.htm>.

**Action Track**  
Published by: SURJ (Stand Up for what's Right and Just)  
100 West 10th Street, Suite 615 Wilmington, DE 19801  
Phone: 302-426-9252 Fax: 302-426-9251 [www.surj.org](http://www.surj.org)  
Executive Director: Stephanie J. Symons, Esq.  
Board Chair: Dale E. Wolf  
Editors/Writers: Stephanie Symons, Dana Sorenson, Joanna Champney, and Katie Wolinski  
Printing: PTI, Printers for Non Profits

Non Profit  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Wilmington, DE  
Permit No. 2003



# ACT! Track

NOVEMBER 2006

### Read On About

- Mandatory Minimum Drug Sentencing 2007
- New Faces at SURJ
- Delaware Reentry Roundtable
- House Bill 443

## In The News

### Mandatory Minimum Drug Sentences: SURJ Prepares for 2007

In June, we were sorry to report that House Bill 181, the SURJ bill that would have repealed Delaware's mandatory minimum drug sentencing laws, was pulled from the House Agenda and did not come up for a vote. SURJ had worked hard to gain support for this crucial reform, and HB 181 had 25 sponsors in the House and was backed by leaders in the legal, law enforcement, and faith communities. However, in the final days of the legislative session, we faced strong opposition from the Attorney General's office that we were not able to overcome.

We know that the repeal of mandatory minimum drug sentences is right for Delaware. Not only do mandatory minimum drug sentencing laws strip judges of their discretion, but by risking inaccurate, arbitrary sentences and the excessive incarceration of non-violent offenders, mandatory minimum drug sentencing laws contribute to Delaware's soaring incarcerated population and corrections expenditures.

SURJ recognizes the urgent need for reform in Delaware and we will continue to fight for the repeal of these laws by introducing new legislation in 2007. As always, we thank each and every one of you for your support. Your help has been deeply appreciated and in the months to come we will call on you again as we prepare for the upcoming legislative session. We know that it is only with enough citizen involvement and participation that these laws will be repealed. We appreciate your continued support and look forward to future success!

#### Why Should Mandatory Minimums Be Repealed?

- One-size-fits-all mandatory minimum drug sentences are inaccurate and risk adding to our already bloated incarcerated population.
- Nation-wide, states are reevaluating these laws, 19 have rolled back or restructured mandatory minimum drug laws, particularly relating to non-violent drug offenders.
- Delaware spends more, per capita, on corrections expenditures than any other state and has one of the highest incarceration rates in the country.
- Each inmate costs Delaware taxpayers \$26,000 a year.
- Alternatives to incarceration, such as drug treatment, may be more cost-effective.

### Two New Faces at SURJ

In June, **Katie Wolinski** joined SURJ as an AmeriCorps\*VISTA Member. Katie will spend a year with SURJ focusing on ex-offender reentry in Delaware. Already her contribution to the Reentry Roundtable has been invaluable and she continues her hard work addressing this important issue. Later this year, Katie will be organizing and coordinating public education events across the state of Delaware about reentry.

Katie graduated from the University of Delaware in May 2006, with a major in History and a minor in Women's Studies. During college she was very involved in community service and served as a Public Relations intern at Planned Parenthood of Delaware. Although still unsure about what she'd like to do in the future, the time Katie has spent at SURJ has interested her in pursuing a career in the criminal justice field.

To learn more about the AmeriCorps\*VISTA project go to: <http://www.americorps.gov/about/programs/vista.asp>.

In August, **Joanna Champney** joined SURJ part-time as our Research Assistant/Office Coordinator. As a former SURJ intern in the summer of 2005, Joanna assisted SURJ with researching mandatory minimum drug sentencing laws. Joanna will continue to provide SURJ with exemplary research, as well as oversee the operations of the office.

Joanna graduated from the University of Delaware in January 2006 with a Bachelor's Degree in Political Science. As an undergraduate, she was named a UD Woman of Promise and was President of the Tassel Chapter of the Mortar Board Senior National Honor Society. While in college, Joanna worked for a criminal defense attorney in Maryland, and also interned at Howard R. Young Correctional Institution in Delaware as a correctional counselor where she became familiar with the treatment programs available to inmates. Joanna plans to pursue graduate studies in Criminology, with emphasis on researching prisoner reentry and barriers to ex-offender employment.

### 2006 Summer Interns: Thanks!

This summer, SURJ welcomed two full-time summer interns: Andrew Mehdizadeh and Kristine Campanelli. Andrew and Kristine worked long hours to help us complete the report for the Delaware Reentry Roundtable and we don't know what we would have done without them!

Andrew is now a junior at Washington College pursuing a degree in Political Science. Kristine is a senior at the University of Delaware, pursuing a degree in Psychology. Both plan to attend law school and are interested in careers in public service. We wish them the best of luck!

### Reentry Roundtable a Success!

The Delaware Reentry Roundtable, co-sponsored by SURJ and the Delaware Center for Justice (DCJ), took place on September 29, 2006 at Widener University School of Law. The Roundtable brought together close to 100 key stakeholders, including state policymakers, community leaders, and criminal

justice experts to address reentry issues. Participants were equipped with reentry data and charged with developing research-based recommendations to improve the success of ex-offenders reentering our communities. The day began with a presentation profiling Delaware's offender population given by Dr. Danilo Yanich of the University of Delaware. At lunch, JoAnne Page, President and CEO of The Fortune Society, addressed the audience and shared her experiences of working with ex-offenders in New York. The event also included breakout sessions in the morning and afternoon addressing the barriers ex-offenders face in terms of housing, employment, physical/mental health, and substance abuse.

The Delaware Reentry Roundtable was an important first step toward significantly improving Delaware's criminal justice system by addressing a problem of increasing concern: how to better ensure the successful transition of ex-offenders from prison to our communities. However, much work remains to be done. SURJ plans to continue the momentum of the Roundtable by issuing a final report that will include action steps and policy initiatives designed to improve reentry in Delaware. Providing inmates with identification upon release that is recognized by all state agencies and compiling a directory of available services for released inmates are examples of the many recommendations that were discussed at the Roundtable. SURJ is also planning public education events about ex-offender reentry during the winter and early spring. For more information about the barriers to reentry and the recommendations that were discussed at the Roundtable, please visit: <http://www.surj.org>.

#### National Statistics of Ex-offender Reentry

- Every year more than 600,000 adults—nearly 1600 each day—leave federal and state prison and return to their homes.
- The average prison term is now 2.5 years.
- More than 59 million Americans have a criminal record on file in state repositories.
- A BJS study found that 30% of all released prisoners are rearrested in the first six months, 44% are arrested within the first year, and 67.5% are rearrested within three years of release from prison.

### HB 443: Police to be Trained in Identifying and Responding to Mental Illness

Across the country, the prison population is growing at an alarming rate. One major factor contributing to this growth is the increased incarceration of the mentally ill. According to the Reentry Policy Council, eight to 16 percent of the prison population and ten percent of the jail population has at least one identified serious mental health disorder and is in need of treatment. One step toward addressing this

*continued on back page*