



## **Commissioner Tommy Adkisson, Precinct 4** San Antonio, Texas

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**August 27, 2010**

**Contact:** Laura Jesse  
210.335.0073/o

### **Bexar County Re-Entry Council reports on its “Smart Justice” accomplishments**

Two years after forming the Bexar County Re-Entry Council, Bexar County Commissioner Tommy Adkisson announced Friday the council has devised multiple strategies to transform the formerly incarcerated into productive citizens. The strategies support the idea that former inmates will be less likely to re-offend if they are able to easily identify and access employment, housing, substance abuse and/or mental health treatment, mentoring and other social services.

“The intent of the Re-Entry Council is to improve public safety by changing lives and to improve the County’s bottom line by reducing recidivism and thus reducing jail costs,” Commissioner Adkisson said, noting that the County’s single largest expense is running the Adult Detention Center.

One of only four re-entry councils in the state, the Bexar County Re-Entry Council is a think tank and working group devoted to the goal of successfully reintegrating offenders back into the community. More than 100 stakeholders representing the legal, law enforcement, judicial, mental health, substance abuse treatment, and university communities have volunteered their time, creativity and resources to this effort.

The strategies developed by the group have been branded as “Smart Justice” and include:

1. **Restorative Justice San Antonio Pilot Program:** This program will begin accepting participants on Oct. 1. Volunteers will work with offenders to re-integrate them back into the community while simultaneously improving the quality of life for area residents. The hallmark of the pilot program will be the

“community circle” in which crime victims, neighbors, business leaders, and faith-based organizations come together to work with offenders as they transition back into the community. Offenders will be encouraged to take responsibility for their actions, and work to repair the harm that they have done. Restorative Justice San Antonio will be piloted in two neighborhoods in the East and West sides of San Antonio. Faculty from the University of Texas at San Antonio’s Department of Criminal Justice will spearhead and evaluate the results of this program.

2. **Ban the Box:** The Employment and Education Subcommittee of the Reentry Council has advocated what is referred to as “Ban the Box” — a movement which encourages employers to look beyond the application form to the prospective employee’s job skills and then determine whether the crime committed was such that it would prevent the employee from performing his/her job duties. Bexar County has adopted this principle and will not decline a convicted misdemeanant’s opportunity to interview for County positions by virtue of their prior convictions.
3. **Promoting hiring of ex-offenders by County contractors:** Each year, Bexar County awards more than \$100 million in contracts to service providers. All county government contractors will now be encouraged to hire ex-offenders. Over the course of the upcoming fiscal year, the Purchasing Department will keep track of the number of employers who hire ex-offenders and will report to Commissioners Court on its findings. Just like Bexar County hires ex-offenders for numerous County positions, Bexar County will encourage subcontractors to do the same.
4. **Job readiness classes:** The Bexar County Sheriff’s Office and Workforce Solutions San Antonio SER – Jobs for Progress, Inc. announced a partnership in which SER – Jobs for Progress will provide job readiness classes within the County’s Adult Detention Center. These three-hour job readiness classes will focus on issues such as how to fill out an application, the do’s and don’ts of job interviews, and how to dress for an interview. These classes will promote employment readiness for offenders in the County jail so they will be able to feed their families, pay their rent, and live as productive members of the community.

5. **Jobs Resource Lab:** Commissioners Court and Workforce Solutions San Antonio SER – Jobs for Progress, Inc. also have collaborated on the development and implementation of a Job Resource Lab located in the Cadena-Reeves Justice Center. This lab is open to individuals within the criminal justice system who encounter difficulty in obtaining employment due to their criminal backgrounds. Judges and Adult Probation Officers make referrals to this lab, where a technician assists individuals with job leads according to their skills and work experience. Participants also receive assistance with résumés and are provided assistance for interviews and job applications. In just 9 months, the Job Resource Lab has assisted more than 1,600 offenders.
  
6. **Resource Directory:** A Resource Directory for ex-offenders is now posted on the County website. This Resource Directory lists more than 100 agencies that assist offenders in the fields of employment, education, substance abuse, health care, housing, social services, and advocacy. All agencies listed in the Resource Directory are also listed on the 211 helpline, which now has a distinct category of services for ex-offenders.
  
7. **One-stop Re-entry Services Center:** Commissioners Court has purchased the Toudouze warehouse near the County Jail and the Adult Probation Department. This warehouse will serve as the future location of a one-stop center for services to be opened at a later date. The one-stop center is currently in the planning stages and will include all services related to the successful reentry of offenders back into the community.

The success of these “Smart Justice” initiatives will be measured by intensive data collection and analysis. Faculty of the UTSA Department of Criminal Justice as well as Our Lady of the Lake University’s School of Social Work have played a leadership role in setting up the program evaluation of all of these initiatives. Performance measures will include, but not be limited to: a reduction in criminal justice recidivism, an increase in mental health and substance abuse treatment compliance, successful job placement and retention, improved social and neighborhood cohesion (for the Restorative Justice pilot program), and other pro-social indicators (i.e. a reduction in Child Protective Services involvement; an increase in child support compliance, etc).