

Governor's Weekly Message Transcript: Improving Our Criminal Justice System to Create New Opportunities

<http://governor.delaware.gov/podcasts/video/WeeklyMessage160219.mp4>

One of the ways we have worked to improve public safety and create opportunity for all Delawareans is through a smarter criminal justice system – a system that reserves limited prison space for violent criminals and emphasizes treatment and community supervision for low-level offenders whose needs outweigh their risks to the community. A significant number of the individuals who enter our justice system battle addiction and mental illness, and experience shows us that these are factors that drive criminal behavior. In fact, fully half of the inmates in Delaware's prisons are addicted to drugs or alcohol. Adopting reforms that include improved efforts to identify and treat them can lower our prison population, keep families intact, and give more offenders the opportunity to be productive citizens.

This week I visited New Expectations, an innovative program in Newark that does just that. It's a residential facility for more than a dozen pregnant offenders who are facing incarceration. For all of these women, ongoing struggles with addiction fueled their involvement in the criminal justice system and it threatens their health and the health of their unborn children. Instead of being sent to prison, they're given the opportunity to live as a group in the community under close supervision and remain together with their babies after delivery. During this time, they receive intensive treatment, participate in parenting and life skills classes,

and are connected to additional resources as they transition to permanent housing. Just like New Expectations, we are investing in other alternatives to incarceration, like a partnership with the Rick VanStory Resource Center that provides community-based supervision and treatment to low-risk defendants who might otherwise spend months in jail awaiting trial.

Together, these programs provide a range of services that simply aren't available in prison and they show the potential to reduce recidivism and to transform lives for the better. And that will keep Delaware moving forward.