

Statement of
The Honorable Russ Feingold

United States Senator
Wisconsin
July 21, 2010

Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing on
"The Second Chance Act: Strengthening Safe and Effective Community Reentry"
Wednesday, July 21, 2010

Statement of U.S. Senator Russell D. Feingold

Mr. Chairman. Thank you for holding this important hearing. Research by the Department of Justice indicates that more than 60% of prison inmates will be rearrested for a felony or serious misdemeanor within three years of their release. In 2008, Congress attempted to address this problem and passed landmark bipartisan legislation called the Second Chance Act. This common sense bill recognized that it is in everyone's interest to ensure that incarcerated individuals become productive members of society and do not return to a life of crime. The Second Chance Act authorizes grant programs to create comprehensive, coordinated reentry services to help formerly incarcerated individuals find stable employment and housing, and hence reduce the likelihood that they will reoffend.

In Wisconsin, the Second Chance Act has had a substantial impact in helping formerly incarcerated individuals readjust to life outside of prison. This past October, the Wisconsin Department of Corrections received funding to expand its "Windows to Work" program, which assists inmates by focusing on employment and independent living as they reenter communities in Brown, Manitowoc, Milwaukee and Sheboygan counties.

Like "Windows to Work," the many programs funded by the Second Chance Act do more than serve transitioning inmates - they also work to protect the residents of our cities and towns by reducing recidivism rates through vocational training, drug treatment, mentoring, and family services. In the long run, lower recidivism rates translate to fewer tax dollars spent on the staggering cost of incarceration. Our nation is struggling to overcome significant budgetary and fiscal hurdles, and that is particularly evident in our nation's prison system. We currently spend approximately \$60 billion every year on state and federal corrections, and that number continues to climb. This is not sustainable, and we need to be doing more to prevent recidivism and ensure that formerly incarcerated individuals become productive members of society.

In part for these reasons, I have introduced the Democracy Restoration Act, which would restore voting rights to nearly four million disenfranchised Americans who have been released from prison. Voting helps to build both a sense of civic responsibility and a commitment to community - two attributes we must work to encourage in our formerly incarcerated citizens.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to working with you to ensure that the Second Chance Act continues to receive adequate funding and is reauthorized in the coming years.