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## V.I. AG Joins National Coalition Urging Congress to Pass Workforce Reentry Act

**AG Gordon Rhea joined 35 attorneys general urging Congress to pass the Workforce Reentry Act, a measure they say would stabilize funding for programs that reduce recidivism, strengthen public safety, and support individuals returning from incarceration.**

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V.I. Attorney General Gordon Rhea has joined 35 other attorneys general nationwide in calling on Congress to enact the Workforce Reentry Act, a bipartisan measure they say is needed to stabilize funding for programs aimed at reducing recidivism, strengthening public safety, and supporting individuals returning to their communities after incarceration.

The announcement came Monday through the V.I. Department of Justice, which detailed both the scope of the legislation and the coalition's push for congressional action.

The Workforce Reentry Act, formally identified as H.R. 1633, would codify existing federal grants that assist formerly incarcerated people in gaining workforce skills and reentering society. According to the DOJ release, supporters of the bill argue that permanent funding would reduce recidivism, lower costs tied to arrest, prosecution, and incarceration, and provide opportunities for individuals to rebuild their lives.

In the statement, Attorney General Rhea emphasized the broader public safety benefits of the measure. "Supporting individuals as they return to our communities isn't just the right thing to do — it makes every one of us safer," he said. He described the act as providing "the stable funding and proven programs needed to reduce recidivism, lower taxpayer costs, and give people the tools to rebuild their lives," adding that investing in opportunity ultimately "strengthen[s] families, communities, and our shared future."

The coalition sent its letter on December 4 to congressional leadership, including Senate Majority Leader John Thune, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, House Speaker Mike Johnson, and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries. The correspondence outlines concerns about fluctuating grant availability and argues that permanent funding streams are essential for organizations implementing reentry services. The letter notes that reentry programs promote accountability while helping formerly incarcerated individuals return to the workforce, support their families, and reduce the likelihood of further victimization.

Federal data referenced in the DOJ materials show how urgent the issue remains. National recidivism rates are about 68 percent within three years of release and rise to 83 percent within nine years, generating substantial taxpayer costs associated with the criminal justice system. The letter stresses that these high rates are not inevitable, pointing to research demonstrating that access to employment opportunities and reentry support can significantly reduce repeat offenses.

Examples cited include Lancaster County and York County in Pennsylvania, where federally funded programs have kept recidivism far below national averages. One initiative reported a 7 percent recidivism rate among participants, while others saw crime drop by 30 percent and prison populations reduced by 45 percent — savings estimated at \$57 million for the county. The coalition argues that such outcomes show how stable funding can improve public safety and produce long-term financial benefits.

The letter also highlights decades of federal support for reentry programs nationwide, with resulting decreases in incarceration rates. However, because current grants are not permanent, the attorneys general maintain that their continued impact is dependent on reliable funding rather than year-to-year budget negotiations.

Beyond Pennsylvania, the letter bears the signatures of attorneys general from states and territories across the country, including American Samoa, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, the Northern Mariana Islands, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Tennessee, Vermont, Washington, West Virginia, and Wyoming. Attorney General Rhea signed on behalf of the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The coalition concludes by urging Congress to act swiftly to pass H.R. 1633, noting that the legislation would attach new requirements to ensure effective use of funds while making long-

term reentry support sustainable. DOJ officials in the territory said the attached letter provides the full explanation of the attorneys general's position and the rationale behind their call for congressional action.

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