

Media Release

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GECAC RECEIVES \$455,000 FOR RE-ENTRY PROGRAM

Erie, PA— The Pennsylvania Department of Education recently awarded a \$455,000 state grant to the Greater Erie Community Action Committee (GECAC) for the Erie County Re-Entry Services and Support Alliance (ECRSSA). The grant will increase access and connections to support services and assistance to individuals who are returning to society after incarceration or are trying to escape from potentially violent situations. Senator Dan Laughlin, Representative Pat Harkins, and Representative Robert Merski led a bipartisan effort to advocate for and obtain this funding to benefit Erie County.

According to Senator Dan Laughlin, a strong advocate for the funding, “This grant will help change lives and give people an opportunity to become productive members of the greater Erie community. I strongly support the work of ECRSSA and its partner organizations who are dedicated to giving individuals a second chance to turn their lives around.”

ECRSSA is designed to provide support and services to transitioning clients through a network of community-based organizations in partnership with the criminal justice system. “ECRSSA helps transitioning clients reintegrate into the community and as a result reduces the chances that the individual will return to criminal activity and end up back in jail,” Senator Laughlin said. “That helps the client and it makes our communities safer.”

GECAC’s re-entry program helps returning citizens successfully "re-enter" society following their incarceration, thereby reducing recidivism, improving public safety, and saving money. The primary focus of the re-entry efforts is to remove or reduce barriers to successful re-entry, so that motivated individuals who have served their time and paid their debt to society are able to compete for a job, attain stable housing, support their children and their families, and contribute to their communities.

The ECRSSA structure and positive staff influence have produced successful results for Erie County. The most recent data report shows that only 7 percent of the clients received new charges that resulted in conviction and incarceration compared to the 41 percent average recidivism rate county-wide.

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ECRSSA staff discuss all options to help a person reintegrate back into the community, with the primary goals of finding employment, locating sustainable housing, and other services to support a successful transition. More than 77 percent of the clients who identified employment as a goal obtained a job.

“We have worked tirelessly to secure this funding because we have seen the value of giving second chances to residents who want only to be good parents, good neighbors, and productive members of the community,” Representative Pat Harkins said. “This program does that, by providing hope and opportunity. I want to thank Governor Wolf and his team, who worked with us to help make this happen.”

Representative Robert Merski agreed, noting, “The surest way to benefit our entire Erie community is to invest back in our most important resource – our people. This program is incredibly valuable because it puts job-sustaining skills into the hands of residents so they can turn their lives around. It provides a new start for those who need it, and in the process, it makes us a stronger, safer community.”

Referrals to the program can be made by jail and prison staff or a parole agent for someone who will be coming back to our community soon. ECRSSA also accepts applications from people who are out of jail or prison and are struggling in the community. Due to COVID-19, GECAC offices are closed to the public but the staff is teleworking from home serving clients via the Internet, telephone, and email. To obtain services call GECAC at 814-459-4581 or visit www.gecac.org.

ECRSSA is part of the Unified Erie’s three-pronged approach to reducing crime: prevention, enforcement, and re-entry. The current state grant will enable ECRSSA to operate until December 31, 2020.

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Community Action changes people’s lives, embodies the spirit of hope, improves communities, and makes America a better place to live. We care about the entire community, and we are dedicated to helping people help themselves and each other.