

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/veras-pathways-project-advisor-among-those-honored-by-white-house-for-expanding-opportunities-for-the-formerly-incarcerated>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

On June 30th, the White House honored 16 people who have worked to expand employment and reentry opportunities for individuals who were previously involved in the criminal justice system. The event, part of the White Houses [Champions of Change](#) series, featured remarks from Piper Kerman, author of the memoir *Orange is the New Black: My Year in a Womens Prison*, and U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder, who presented each honoree with their award.

Award recipients included people from law enforcement, the health care industry, higher education, and faith-based groups, as well as formerly incarcerated individuals who started their own businesses. Attorney General Holder spoke about how reentry not only makes economic sense, but that helping formerly incarcerated individuals secure housing and jobs so they may reach their full potential and become productive members of society is a moral imperative.

One of the honorees was Stanley Richards, who is the Senior Vice President of Programs for the Fortune Society and a member of the national advisory board for Veras [Pathways from Prison to Postsecondary Education Project](#), a five-year initiative that aims to expand access to higher education for people in prison and those recently released. During a panel discussion at the event, Mr. Richards mentioned the importance of education in helping the formerly incarcerated believe in themselves and [highlighted the work](#) of the Pathways Project.

Through outside funding from the Ford Foundation, the Sunshine Lady Foundation, the Open Society Foundations, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Pathways Project provides states with incentive funding and technical assistance. Currently, the participating states Michigan, New Jersey, and North Carolina are required to match 25 percent of the provided funding. The Pathways model is also being adapted for a major effort to provide higher education for incarcerated and justice-involved individuals in California.

Through this project, Vera hopes to demonstrate how higher education and reentry services can lead to increased educational credentials, a reduction in recidivism, and an increase in employability and earnings for formerly incarcerated individuals.

The White Houses recognition of champions like Mr. Richards demonstrates the value that President Obamas administration places on reentry. As Attorney General Holder noted, 95 percent of those incarcerated will be released back to their communities, and we expect them to remain crime-free, sober, obtain a job, find housing, and become productive members of society. To accomplish this and to succeed, we need to provide them with the necessary skills found in higher education, which will transform lives and help build stronger families and communities.

Transformative change, sent to your inbox.

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