

# Supporting Women in the Criminal Legal System Through Access to Diversionary Programs



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Art by the People's Paper Co-op in  
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**#SupportNotSanctions #WomensVoicesBetterChoices**

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**Images and artwork:**

*All art created by the People's Paper Co-op in collaboration with a brave and visionary group of women in reentry, who helped design the artwork for this report. Photographs by Mark Strandquist. Art workshop facilitation by Courtney Bowles and Jamila Harris.*

**In Solidarity:**

Managing Director's Office of Criminal Justice  
Women's Law Project  
Why Not Prosper  
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Lutheran Settlement House  
The Gender Justice Fund  
The People's Paper Co-op  
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Ardella's House

## Executive Summary

A national reckoning on the racism that is baked into our criminal legal system; a pandemic that has threatened the lives and health of people behind bars and in our communities; widespread unemployment that is causing significant hardship for Philadelphia families – these circumstances underlie the urgency of our call in this report for Philadelphia's leaders to retool, rethink, and reimagine how the programs and systems that divert people from the criminal legal system operate.

This report is grounded in the lived experiences of women who have had criminal system contact and were compensated to share their insights and recommendations with our city's leaders; their contributions are quoted directly throughout the report and inform all of the recommendations for reforming and reimaging diversionary programs. We use the terms "women/woman" in this report while recognizing that our current criminal system does not properly recognize that transgender women are women. Our report and recommendations include and apply to transgender women. We also support non-binary and gender non-conforming people being included in the type of gender-responsive and trauma-informed programming we recommend.

In this report, we call for diversionary programs to recognize the unique experiences and needs of women who have contact with the criminal system, to center and compensate directly impacted women in designing and creating programs, and to offer effective community-based gender and trauma responsive services that recognize the individual needs, strengths, and agency of women. These programs should be offered to women as the rule, rather than the exception, under consistent and transparent processes.

We also call for the removal of barriers to the current diversionary programs that exist so that women have expanded access to diversion and are set up to succeed in diversionary programs. For example, programs should not require payment of exorbitant court fines and costs, include lengthy probation terms, and include many program requirements that are infeasible, particularly for women who are caregivers. Programs must provide transportation and child care support or accommodations so that people are not boxed out due to financial or time constraints. Programs must include expungement of records, or



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avoid creating records in the first place, in order to avoid perpetual punishment and devastating economic consequences.

We recognize that the City of Philadelphia, the District Attorney's Office, and other city leaders have already expressed commitment to many of the principles and policies outlined in this report, and we hope that our recommendations for the existing programs will provide a roadmap to increasing access, equity, and effectiveness. But we also call on our leaders to do more than reform around the edges of our criminal system, but rather to reimagine the system altogether. We propose a vision for a new trauma and gender responsive diversionary program for women that would be designed by directly impacted women and would divert women from ever being arrested in the first place. Such a program would invest in effective community-based strategies and be based on the agency of women to identify for themselves what they need to stay free and thrive.

## Overview of Process

The Incarcerated Women's Working Group (the "Working Group") is a coalition that advocates with and on behalf of incarcerated women and women in reentry for meaningful systems change. Our work is rooted in a recognition of the humanity and dignity of incarcerated women and their families and an acknowledgement of the widespread harms the system causes them. We aim to generate both visionary and concrete strategies for changing women's experiences of the criminal legal system and prison system, using community organizing and policy advocacy strategies to address political and economic gender gaps. The coalition is co-facilitated by staff from the ACLU of Pennsylvania (ACLU-PA) and from Community Legal Services (CLS), and by two formerly incarcerated women who are in paid positions as Working Group consultants.

In preparation for compiling this report, we spoke with stakeholders who attend the Incarcerated Women's Working Group meetings, gathering initial input about potential barriers to enrolling in or completing diversionary programs. We also reached out to the Defender's Association and the District Attorney's office for help with understanding the breadth of programs available in the city, and the general data on how many people enroll and how many complete. We created a survey to gather input directly from women who have lived experience with the legal system in Philadelphia. We initially had plans to implement the survey in focus groups, at the jails and in the courtrooms, but these plans were limited by the COVID19 pandemic. We ultimately pivoted to completing 12 in-depth qualitative interviews by phone instead of a larger number of short surveys.

## We Need Trauma and Gender Responsive Services

“We need more counseling. There is not enough people that care. We are being bombarded with addiction and there is not enough people to help.” - *Survey Participant*

While women are the fastest growing demographic group among people who are incarcerated, their specific needs are often overlooked by the criminal legal system, jail administrators and even advocates and activists fighting for reforms. Black women in particular face increased targeting by and experience violence and trauma within the criminal legal system. As a result of their particular identity at the intersection of race, gender, and oftentimes poverty, low income Black women face some of the highest disparities in the justice system. In this moment of nationwide reckoning, we want to acknowledge the unique vulnerabilities of Black women to violence in their encounters with the criminal legal system.

A primary goal of programs that divert people from traditional prosecution is to avoid retraumatization and to offer rehabilitation and treatment instead of punishment.



*Art by the People's Paper Co-op in collaboration with Rysheda Elliott, Ivy Johnson, Tinika Hogan*

However, for these programs to be effective and successful in fulfilling the goal of disrupting incarceration, these programs must be trauma and gender responsive. A system or program that is gender responsive takes into account the different reasons why women and girls engage in criminalized behaviors and their unique barriers, needs and contributions. Incarcerated women are often mothers and primary caregivers to other family members. Women play a unique role in their communities and they have unique barriers to accessing services.

System-involved women often have severe histories of childhood and adulthood trauma prior to and during their incarceration. Childhood trauma is associated with the risk for emotional disorders (e.g., depression and anxiety) and conditions such as alcohol/drug abuse and antisocial behaviors in adulthood. Women who are abused often end up in the criminal legal system, where they are treated as criminals rather than survivors. Without

treatment, women who experience multiple traumas are more prone to adverse health effects that lead to chronic diseases, drug and alcohol misuse, mental health instability and untimely deaths.

“Someone gave me liquor and it was something in it....I called the cops and they didn’t listen to me when they came...I was fighting for my life, they didn’t want to hear that it was poison in my system that made me act like that, they didn’t care. They didn’t run any test to see what was wrong with me.” - *Survey Participant talking about the need for first responders to examine and identify needs surrounding mental health, substance use, and trauma when being called to the scene.*

By definition, trauma is neurobiological and leads to trauma survivors being easily triggered into or chronically “stuck” in the body’s stress response. Changes in brain chemistry and structure occur as a result of higher levels of stress hormones. Hyperarousal, behavioral control, poor impulse control, self-destructive behavior, and aggression towards others are all symptoms of trauma that present unique challenges for women who encounter the criminal legal system. Trauma-responsive care plays an important role in service delivery by providing a framework for accommodating the vulnerability of trauma survivors.

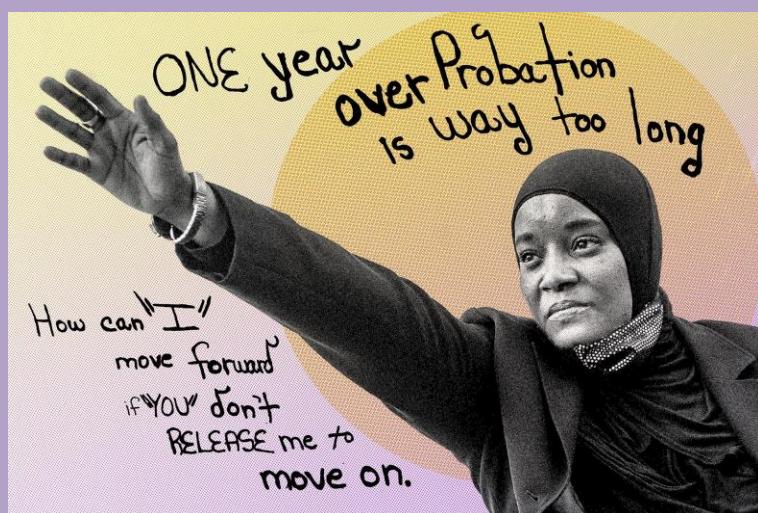
In order for women to heal from their traumas and break the cycle of incarceration for themselves and their children, gender and trauma responsive interventions are necessary. Studies show that women benefit from gender-responsive services; however, there are few supportive services available that offer support tailored to meet their unique needs. Gender-responsive programming takes into account the unique needs, inequalities, vulnerabilities, and barriers faced by women and girls. Trauma-sensitive interventions identify safety as the foundation for working with persons to eliminate self-harm, develop trustworthy relationships, overcome challenges, promote wellness and remove themselves from dangerous situations. Helping traumatized women to regain a sense of control is critical; incarceration will not provide this. Incarceration instead creates new trauma and exacerbates existing trauma. Diversionary programs, however, offer a unique opportunity to help women avoid further traumatization and exercise agency by engaging with effective community-based programs.

## Overview of Current Diversionary Program System in Philadelphia

There are around a dozen diversionary programs offered through the Philadelphia court system. Many programs rely on defense attorneys advocating with the District Attorney's Office (DAO) for their clients to be entered into these programs. Many of the diversionary programs, like veteran's court, drug court, and mental health court, have very specific eligibility requirements to enter. There are two main diversionary programs that are more broadly accessible, and most commonly used: the Accelerated Rehabilitative Disposition (ARD) program and the Accelerated Misdemeanor Program (AMP). Both programs are generally geared toward "first time offenders" and those facing more minor misdemeanor charges like drug possession or DUI.

Many, but not all, diversionary programs allow records to be expunged at the completion of the program. Most programs also include requirements like probation, treatment, classes, and community service. Programs also generally come with high price tags - hundreds of dollars can be assessed for participation in diversionary programs, and programs often cannot be completed or expunged until fines and costs are paid.

Through surveys with directly impacted women, and through the experiences of the members of our working group, we have identified significant barriers for women to enter and complete these existing diversionary programs. We offer policy recommendations to increase access to and successful completion of the current diversionary programs, and we also propose a vision for what a gender and trauma responsive diversionary program for women could look like.

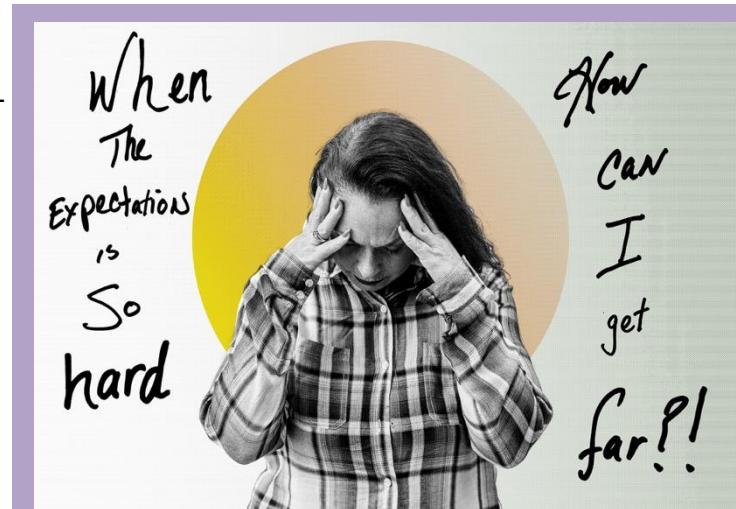


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## Barriers for Women Entering and Completing Diversionary Programs

### *Barriers to Women Entering Diversion Programs*

- Many programs are **limited to “first-time offenders”** or limit participation based on prior criminal history, open cases, or bench warrants for minor offenses, and are thus not responsive to the cyclical nature of carceral involvement created by the impact of trauma, addiction, and poverty.
- Many programs are **limited to “non-violent offenses”** and are thus not responsive to the ways that trauma, domestic violence, sexual violence, and other forms of harm that disproportionately impact women lead women to be charged with “violent offenses.”
- Many programs have very **specific and narrow criteria for admissions** e.g. veteran’s court, mental health court, drug treatment court, etc. that can leave women who need and could benefit from diversionary programs out of being able to access them.
- There is a **lack of consistency** in women being informed about programs and having advocates to push for admission into programs.



*Art by the People's Paper Co-op in collaboration with Valerie Todd Listman*

### *Barriers to Women Completing Diversion Programs*

- **Court fines and costs** which are almost always assessed as a condition of completion for diversionary programs, can be very costly. Most women who want to enter or are in diversionary programs do not have the financial resources to afford to pay, and as a result cannot complete the program and cannot get their records expunged. Furthermore, the pressure to pay court debt can take limited resources away from other needs like housing, food, and taking care of children, and can lead women back into the system out of desperation.

“I basically went to a hearing with just me in the room. The judge read the charges, said I can take 3 years of probation and get the record completely expunged or do one year of probation and they wipe all of my record except for the use and possession of marijuana misdemeanor. She took the guilty plea for one year of probation. I did not have that much money to pay for the 3 years of probation....The money is what deterred me from doing the 3 years to get it all expunged. Also, I always wanted to travel and 3 years was a long time to feel trapped in the state.” - *Survey Participant, on fines and costs burden.*

- **Onerous program requirements**, such as classes, treatment, probation, community service, and more can be placed as conditions for completion of diversionary programs. This can be overwhelming, especially for women juggling childcare responsibilities with trying to attain income, employment, etc.

“The fact that they wanted us to do so much therapy and so many groups, it made it feel like you could not have a life beyond groups and therapy and it was too much. It’s like you needed some type of break and you could not get one because you had group 2-3 times a week, recovery house with a curfew, court 2-3 times month and you have so many restrictions on you that you feel trapped. It can make girls go back out on the run. When I tried to get a job they were against it. I told them if you don’t let a girl who lived a life of prostitution work to pay for things (hygienic products, transportation, etc), if you don’t let me get a job, it’ll make me go back to my old ways and they finally let me get a job after arguing with them. They said I can as long as it does not interfere with group and therapy.” - *Survey Participant, talking about onerous Dawn’s Court requirements.*

- **The lack of an individualized needs and strengths based, gender and trauma responsive approach** to tailoring services and program components means women are less likely to actually be helped by and complete programs. Services are often mandated in a paternalistic and generalized manner without consideration of the expressed wants, strengths and needs of participants.

I need to live and I need more to my life than just this program. I need to know what life will be like when this program is done. They should be encouraging to get a job and do these kinds of things. - *Survey Participant, talking about Dawn’s Court.*

- **Lengthy probation terms**, which run counter to the goal of diverting women from the system, make it more likely women will get tripped up on technical violations that cause them to not complete programs and even end up being incarcerated.

[There should be] shorter probation [terms] for first offense, I received 2 years. Especially at the rate at which I completed all the other terms of my program-including court fees. I had to stay on probation and the record would still show up. - *Survey Participant on having to remain on probation to for the full two years of her probation term despite completing her community service, anger management class, and paying off her fines and costs within the first year.*

- **The lack of available spots in high quality community-based programs** such as mental health, drug treatment, workforce development, and family reunification, mean that women are forced to comply with services that do not meet their needs or fit their schedule. People need more support to comply with program requirements.

ARD should do a better job of understanding why people are in this situation in the first place. They would not let me do community service at my job. I had to find another nonprofit organization. I tried looking up different recreational centers, for something not between 9-5 because I work. I found someone I knew and it worked out. Finding flexible resources [would be really helpful]. - *Survey Participant, on issues completing community service.*



## Policy Recommendations

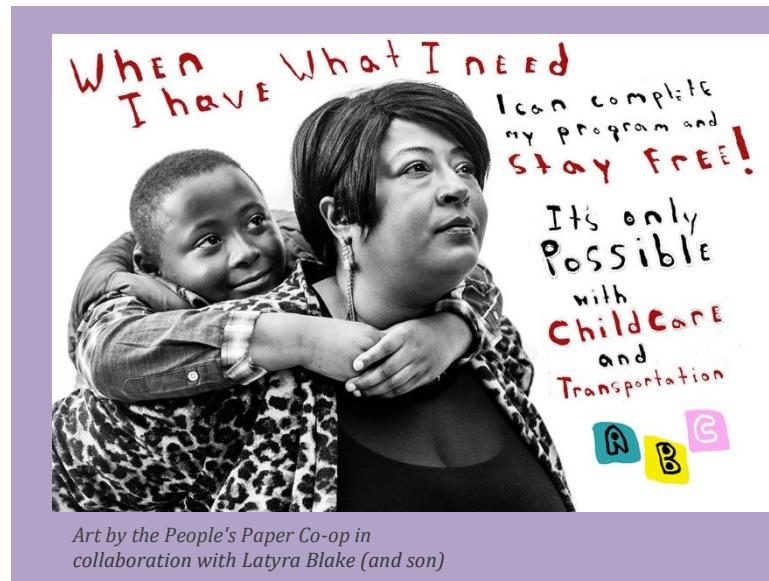
### *Increase Access to Diversionary Programs for Women*

- Programs like the ARD program and the AMP program are the most widely used and accessible diversionary programs, but also usually restrict access to those who have little to no prior system contact and who are being charged with “non violent” misdemeanor offenses.
  - Within the ARD program, the District Attorney’s Office has wide discretion to offer access, and can offer access for a broader range of offenses. **The DAO should use that discretion to broaden access to ARD for women, including for “violent” or subsequent offenses, when it is clear that women have experienced trauma that has contributed to their system-contact.**
- To ensure that women are accessing diversionary programs consistently, and especially women not represented by the Defender Association of Philadelphia , **the DAO should have a process for reviewing new cases for possible entrance into diversionary programs, deciding which programs are most appropriate and least onerous, and streamlining the enrollment of women into programs.**
- The DAO should regularly **track and publicly release data** on diversion rates by race/gender and document decisions to deny diversion to monitor and ensure equity in access to programs.
- **Pre-arrest diversionary programs** that prevent women from ever being booked into the system like the **Police Assisted Diversion (PAD) program** should be expanded to more areas of the city, made less restrictive based on type of offense and prior bench warrant status, and use a gender and trauma-responsive lens to connect women with appropriate services that they identify needing.

### *Eliminate Barriers to Successful Program Completion*

- **Eliminate fines and costs as a condition of program completion, especially for individuals who lack financial means.**

- Judges overseeing diversionary programs should implement a streamlined assessment of ability to pay before assessing any fines, costs, or fees relating to the program, as required by Pennsylvania law.
  - If after an assessment of ability to pay fines and costs a Judge determines an individual entering a diversion program has the financial means to pay, fines and costs may be assessed **only in proportion to ability to pay**.
- **Programs should include at MOST two requirements for completion**, including probation. Additional services should be offered on a voluntary basis. Program requirements should be individually tailored to the expressed needs and wants of program participants using a strengths-based model. Requirements, such as community service, must also take into account other time commitments and responsibilities of participants, such as employment, child care, or dependent care.
- To the extent that program participants are already involved in other systems that have similar requirements, such as the child welfare system, the welfare system, the shelter system, or others, **participants should be allowed to use participation in programs through those systems to satisfy diversionary program requirements**.
- **Programs must provide the resources needed for participants to engage in required activities.** The ability to afford transportation or to have safe and reliable child care are significant burdens for women that can prevent them from engaging in programs. Diversionary programs must ensure funding for transportation to get to required program activities, and must assist women with children in securing child care. If child care cannot be secured, any programs that conflict with the ability to care for children must be waived. To the extent that remote programming can be offered, that can help to avoid many of these barriers.



- Programs must connect participants to high quality services. In order to connect participants to services that will meet their needs, diversionary programs must first **conduct individualized needs assessments that accurately identify the areas where participants need and want support**. Community-based organizations that are the experts in building the trust required to do this effectively should be utilized to do needs assessments.
- When participants express a need for connection to drug treatment, mental health, family reunification, workforce development, or other types of programs, diversionary programs should assist with connecting participants to **high quality community-based programs**. This requires having relationships with community-based programs, and could also involve advocacy and fundraising efforts on behalf of such programs to ensure they have the capacity to meet the needs of participants.
- **Programs should be designed to truly divert women from the system.** Once participants are admitted to programs, there should be a streamlined process to connect participants with the relevant community-based supports. Court hearings and appearances should be limited as much as possible, with a focus on the community-based programming providing support rather than supervision. When participants struggle to engage with required programming, there should be a “non-judicial” track whereby the community-based programs can intervene to re-engage participants.
- **Probation terms for diversionary programs should not exceed one year.** In order for diversionary programs to fulfill their functions in diverting people from incarceration, it is essential that they are capped. One year is sufficient time to ensure individuals have accessed programs and services they need, without needlessly tripping people up and causing them to extend their time in the system.

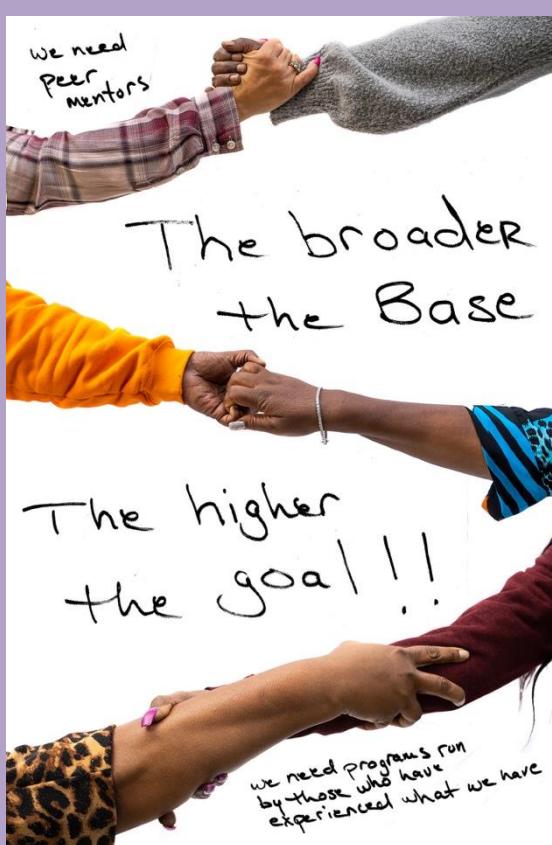


*Art by the People's Paper Co-op in collaboration with Tinika Hogan*

- **Timely expungement must be included as a component of all diversionary programs.** If records of involvement in diversionary programs are not expunged, the purpose of diverting people from the system is thwarted. Records can serve as a form of continuous punishment for people long after their time in the system is finished, causing a lack of access to jobs, housing, education, public benefits, family stability, and more. Preventing this harm is essential to ensure that people who are diverted are able to maintain stability and access future opportunities.

### ***Reimagine a Gender and Trauma Responsive Program***

While increasing women's access to effective diversion programs is an important step toward creating better outcomes for women and girls with criminal system contact, a crucial next step is to create a gender and trauma responsive program that, at the time of arrest, identifies women's unique needs in living more stable and peaceful lives. Directly impacted women should be compensated and centered in the design and creation of such a program.



*Art by the People's Paper Co-op in collaboration with Valerie Todd Listman, Adrian Perry, Rysheda Elliott, Ivy Johnson, Latyra Blake, Michelle Scales*

#### ***Why Reimagine?***

As this report has highlighted, women have unique needs and circumstances that lead them to be system-involved in the first place, and impact the way they respond to programming. There is only so much that our existing punitive court system framework can adapt to become truly responsive to those needs.

Only a new program built from the ground up and designed by directly impacted women will be able to truly capture the full range of unique issues, challenges, and needs of women who have contact with the criminal system. Such a program would stem from an anti-oppressive framework that does not operate from a place of fear and punishment, but from the question of what people need to grow, rather than comply.

## ***Reimagining***

As has been discussed in many criminal legal system reform spaces, the criminal system needs more than reform, it needs reimagining. We are in a moment nationally that calls for radical reimagining of criminal legal systems, and in particular, how these systems oppress Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and people who are poor. The work of our subcommittee predates this particular national conversation, but this moment fuels our call for urgent action.

So what does a radically reimagined gender and trauma responsive program that diverts women from the criminal system look like? It looks like:

- Directly impacted women being compensated and centered in the design and creation of such a program.
- Peer mentors and credible messengers being employed to conduct needs assessments and connect participants to community-based resources in a culturally responsive way, while providing ongoing support.
- Diverting women pre-arrest so that they do not experience the significant trauma and harm that stems from involvement in every aspect of the system, from detention, to court appearances, to supervision, to having a criminal record.
- Inclusive programming that does not weed women out based on predetermined criteria, but rather views each woman as an individual with dreams and goals who can be supported to achieve them.
- Women identifying for themselves what they need to stay free in their communities, rather than being told what they need to do to comply.
- Well-funded and effective community-based programs being available and easy to access.
- Connection to income, employment, housing, and the other economic necessities that are essential to individuals and communities thriving.

Philadelphia can meet this moment and be a national leader in reimaging our criminal system, while centering the unique needs of women in the process.

## **Acknowledgements and Thank Yous**

The Subcommittee of the Working Group would like to acknowledge the support from Gender Justice Fund and Women's Way for their financial support in making this report a reality.

## **Appendix A**

Reference Articles:

*Impact of Incarceration on Women*

<https://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/indicator/2019/04/incarcerated-women>

*Trauma*

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5079438/>

<https://blog.wheelock.edu/women-and-incarceration-how-trauma-begets-trauma/>

<https://cjinvolvedwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/APPA-2014-Applying-a-Trauma-Informed-Aproach.pdf>

*Gender Responsiveness*

[https://www.pacecenter.org/images/PACE\\_brief\\_March2017\\_web.pdf](https://www.pacecenter.org/images/PACE_brief_March2017_web.pdf)

<https://info.nicic.gov/nicrp/system/files/018017.pdf>

*Relevant Philadelphia Initiatives*

<https://www.phila.gov/2020-01-06-mayor-kenney-signs-executive-order-on-diversity-equity-and-inclusion/>

<https://www.policylink.org/resources-tools/media/fines-and-fees-reform>

<https://www.phila.gov/programs/philadelphia-reforms/>

<http://www.safetyandjusticechallenge.org/challenge-site/philadelphia/>

## **Appendix B**

Selected testimonials gathered from the survey implemented by the Incarcerated Women's Working Group Diversionary Programs Subcommittee.

### ***Therapy***

"We need more counseling. There is not enough people that care. We are being bombarded with addiction and there is not enough people to help." -Survey Participant

### ***Family Reunification***

"When you are getting out, sometimes your family does not want anything to do with you and you are doomed because you are not getting help, especially from your loved ones. You still need help and if you do not have help you go back to the same stuff. It's a vicious cycle, with people in and out of jail. People need help get their identifying documents, like their birth certificate, to be able to work and get housing." -Survey Participant talking about needs for family reunification upon returning home

"I am back in my kids life full time now and I feel like my responsibility to them is overlooked [by Dawn's Court]. Sometimes stuff comes up with them and I have to step up. Their father has been raising them for years. It's my time to step up and be there for them. One time I skipped group session to chaperone a trip for my daughter, and I went to a mommy and me day at my daughter's school and I got punished for that. I don't understand that." -Survey Participant talking about Dawn Court

### ***Job Placement***

"I wasn't offered any help with jobs once I got home. I was on my own. All I heard was "no" once the record came back. They should have better programs because a lot of us are taking pleas and going to prison, and as people who are not educated about the system we just listen to lawyers and do what they think is best, but we're being auctioned off really. They threaten us with time and we plead." -Survey Participant on need for job support upon returning home.

### ***Overly Burdensome Requirements***

"I go to therapy at JJPI on Broad and Chestnut. When I finish Dawn Court I will still attend JJPI. It's for anybody with trauma. They deal with children and adults with trauma. I don't know if it's all sexual trauma. The fact that they wanted us to do so much therapy and so many groups, it made it feel like you could not have a life beyond groups

and therapy and it was too much. It's like you needed some type of break and you could not get one because you had group 2-3 times a week, recovery house with a curfew, court 2-3 times month and you have so many restrictions on you that you feel trapped. It can make girls go back out on the run. When I tried to get a job they were against it. I told them if you don't let a girl who lived a life of prostitution work to pay for things (hygienic products, transportation, etc), if you don't let me get a job, it'll make me go back to my old ways and they finally let me get a job after arguing with them. They said I can as long as it does not interfere with group and therapy. I found a job with a catering facility." -Survey Participant talking about Dawn's Court

### ***Paternalism***

"I didn't feel like I had their support at the beginning and even now. Like they don't have my best interest at heart. I have a 6-year-relationship that I am in with a great man. I was made a boss at my job and they have been against all of it. They don't want me to be in a relationship and or working as many hours as I work. I have been through IOP (Intensive Outpatient Programs) so many times just to make them happy. You can graduate IOP in 6-8 months, but I stayed in to make them happy. They think I should be doing more hours. I need to live and I need more to my life than just this program. I need to know what life will be like when this program is done. They should be encouraging to get a job and do these kinds of things. Luckily, my therapist at JJPI fought for me to get the internship at People Paper Coop. They thought it would be wonderful for me. There was a scheduling conflict and PPC hours were the same times as group therapy. She said let her do PPC and I will do a one on one with her before she goes to that." - Survey Participant talking about Dawn's Court.

### ***Connection to Community Service***

"ARD should do a better job of understanding why people are in this situation in the first place. They would not let me do community service at my job. I had to find another nonprofit organization. I tried looking up different recreational; centers, for something not between 9-5 because I work. I found someone I knew and it worked out. Finding flexible resources to let people know where they can go. It took me an extra two months just to find a community service site." -Survey Participant on issues completing community service.

### ***Fines and Costs as a Barrier to Accessing Diversion Programs***

"I basically went to a hearing with just me in the room. The judge read the charges, said I can take 3 years of probation and get the record completely expunged or do one year

of probation and they wipe all of my record except for the use and possession of marijuana misdemeanor. She took the guilty plea for one year of probation. I did not have that much money to pay for the 3 years of probation. They made me do monitor connect. It was \$76 a month on top of fine. They even cut the fine in half. The money is what deterred me from doing the 3 years to get it all expunged. Also, I always wanted to travel and 3 years was a long time to feel trapped in the state.” -Survey Participant on fines and costs burden.

### ***Improper Documentation of Payments***

“I did make sure I made my payments. I tried my hardest even when I stopped working to do odd jobs to make sure my cell phone bill was paid, I had a transpass and to make sure I paid my court costs. This was already paid off but I moved in 2009 and was not able to take my papers with me due to a bad breakup and I do not have proof of my payments...I wasn’t computer savvy and didn’t know how to check and see that my payments weren’t being documented by the courts. I just thought they were.” -Survey Participant on payments not being recorded by court holding up her ARD.

“They told me all I had to do was pay off the fine, I would go to the building on Broad Street. It took me a summer to do it. I did not have to do the 2 years probation. When I paid off the fine the dude said okay bye.” -Survey Participant on having already paid her court costs but needing to do so again to have her record sealed.

### ***Probation Too Long***

*On what would have been more helpful with her ARD experience, Survey Participant answered...* “Shorter probation for first offense (I received 2 years). Especially at the rate at which I completed all the other terms of my program- including court fees. I had to stay on probation and the record would still show up. On barriers to employment, Survey Participant wrote...“Not being able to secure a lower level job because of a failed background check drove me deeper into depression. It prevented me from applying to jobs in my industry and led to years of underemployment through a series of temporary jobs. I suffered extreme anxiety. I lived in constant fear of my background being exposed and judged in my tight knit industry. I did not apply to grad school because of a question about arrests on the financial aid form.”

### ***Trauma, Mental Health, Substance Use***

“The judge said ‘you got 5 personalities, you not no joke.’ He crippled me so that I did not have a choice but to get on public assistance. I’ve been crippled and forced to just

accept that a judge diagnosed me with 5 personalities and all I was good for was to get a disability check. I will never forget his name, Gregory Smith. I was fighting for my life. Someone gave me liquor and it was something in it. ...She put something in my drink and I called the cops and they didn't listen to me when they came. I fought and kicked, his gun [the cop] went flying. The cop hit me so hard. I was fighting for my life, they didn't want to hear that it was poison in my system that made me act like that, they didn't care. They didn't run any test to see what was wrong with me." -Survey Participant

Help Us  
Help Ourselves,  
as we can  
help others get free!!

