

The Gate Money Program Bill Can Build a Safer New York and Save Money

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Currently, New Yorkers returning to the community after a period of incarceration are provided \$40, a MetroCard or other ticket for public transportation, and a non-driver identification card. Together, the resources provided to people leaving prison are commonly referred to as [gate money](#), which is meant to help them cover immediate expenses such as transportation or basic necessities as they transition back into their community. Fifty years ago, \$40 was [found](#) to be inadequate to serve this purpose; today it is woefully insufficient.

The Brennan Center supports the Gate Money Program bill ([S. 6643A/A. 9115](#)), aimed at increasing the amount of money people are provided when leaving prison through a new reentry fund. By providing financial assistance to those leaving prison, this bill helps bridge the gap between incarceration and successful reintegration into the community. New York must prioritize supporting members of the community who are returning from incarceration — it cannot afford to neglect their needs any longer.

For the roughly [157,047 men and 31,470 women released from prison](#) in New York each year, reentry and reintegration into the community can be a difficult and arduous task. Formerly incarcerated people typically return home [without savings or other financial resources](#), making that transition all the more difficult. The collateral consequences of a criminal conviction prevent people from accessing essential resources or to help with successful reentry. For example, those leaving prison struggle to secure [employment, housing, and access to higher education](#). Even those who do successfully find employment [typically earn around half](#) of what their never-incarcerated peers make annually.

Recently, some efforts to supplement what the New York provides those leaving prison produced encouraging results. Most notably, in April of 2020, the Center for Employment Opportunities implemented the [Returning](#)

[Citizen Stimulus](#) program to assist people released from incarceration during the Covid-19 pandemic successfully reintegrate into their communities. The center has [distributed cash assistance to nearly 2,000 New Yorkers](#) through that stimulus program, and the [results have been profound](#). An [evaluation of the program](#) found that most recipients used the money to cover the cost of food, housing, transportation and other essential personal care expenses. Evaluations of cash assistance in other contexts have had promising results. Access to cash-assistance has been associated with a [decline in violent crime arrest rates](#) and short term support also [sharply reduces recidivism](#) among women. Participants in one cash assistance program for people leaving prison also [reported](#) that cash assistance helped them find and maintain employment.

The Gate Money Program would address the struggles faced by people returning from prison or jail head-on by providing stipends of [\\$425 each month for up to six months](#), so long as they remain compliant with conditions of their release. The total amount would not exceed \$2,550 and would be adjusted annually for inflation. To pay for this program, lawmakers are asking for \$25 million from the state general fund. For comparison, [New York spends an average of \\$115,000 per year](#) to incarcerate just one person in state prison, and the entire annual operating budget for the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision in 2023 was [over \\$3 billion](#). By investing in people returning to the community, there is the possibility of [substantial economic benefits for taxpayers](#) as fewer individuals who were previously incarcerated are likely to return to prison post-release.

The Gate Money Program bill gives us a rare chance to reduce recidivism and enhance public safety while also saving New York money. We urge lawmakers to seize this opportunity that will benefit all New Yorkers.