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EDITORIAL

## A Second Chance

With prison costs soaring, many states are understandably desperate for ways to cut recidivism and increase the chances that newly released prisoners build viable lives. The Second Chance Act, signed into law by President Bush last month, would galvanize the re-entry effort, providing the states with money and guidance. Now Congress must appropriate the promised dollars.

Some states are already leading the way. In Illinois — where the inmate population has doubled since the late 1980s — Gov. Rod Blagojevich has begun a promising re-entry program that could become a national model. The comprehensive plan includes drug treatment, job training and placement and a variety of community-based initiatives designed to help newly released inmates forge successful postprison lives.

Illinois is also revamping its parole system by hiring more parole officers and changing regulations so that parolees who commit lesser violations are dealt with in their community — with counseling, drug treatment or more vigilant monitoring — rather than being reflexively sent back to prison. The state is working with Chicago's Safer Foundation to provide job training and placement for people just out of prison.

Parole-based reforms are also proving effective in Texas and Kansas. Both states have expanded drug treatment and other services and have seen a drop in parole revocations. Therapeutic programs that help ex-offenders reconnect with their families — while providing them with medical and mental health care — are also important.

A fully funded Second Chance Act would help other states develop their own much-needed re-entry programs. The \$330 million cost is a small price to pay to reduce prison populations and give more ex-offenders a better chance to make it on the outside.