



December 2019

Volume III: Issue 10

NEWSLETTER

Welcome to another edition of our Second Chance Quest (SCQ) newsletter. SCQ was founded by several prisoners who shared a common vision of reducing the prison population through means of alternative sanctions geared towards nonviolent prisoners. Our vision further includes mentoring prisoners and at-risk children in hope of not only reducing the recidivism rate, but also, in ending the school-to-prisoner pipeline nationally.

For the past four years Second Chance Quest has been mentoring prisoners through our twelve week course here in the prison and have graduated over three hundred prisoners from our program in Buckingham Correctional Center. At present, we have reached across the aisle and have reached out to the Latino community here in the prison so that they too can benefit from our mentoring program. We are pleased with the response we've received from their community. We are happy to report that we are now in our sixth week of SCQ bilingual support group. The turn out and support we have been getting from the Latino brothers is amazing. Our understanding and respect of their culture and vice versa is written on the faces of the men attending the program. Mind you, the makeup of our class is 75% Latino prisoners to 25% English speaking prisoners.

Our mentoring program has opened doors in this facility for past graduates to be accepted in vocational programs offered here in the pris-

on. So, it was always our hope that those doors would also be opened to the Latino men here as well. I am pleased to report, plans are now in the works to make arrangements to have a Spanish interpreter in the Electronic Vocational Program in order that those who only speak Spanish will be afforded the opportunity to attend vocational school. Hats off to the Administration and the Education Department for taking on the challenge.

Second Chance Quest, for the past two years, has registered along with over 200 other organizations and churches across the country to recognize the month of April as "Second Chance Month." Spearheaded by Prison Fellowship, the NAACP, and the A.C.L.U., this signed proclamation by President Trump encourages organizations to use the month to bring awareness to the plights of ex-offenders transitioning back into society to become law abiding citizens. While some organizations have chosen to meet their commitment by holding 5k runs, galas, and town meetings, Second Chance Quest, has chosen to go the route of Social Media by holding a four day Social Media Takeover.

Our "Social Media Takeover" is as follows, each day we feature an array of guests. Day one: We have a call-in from the founders of Second Chance Quest from different state facilities in Virginia. Day two: We feature a roundtable discussion with activists, city and state leaders who are committed in bringing about

prison reform. Day three: We have call-ins from female prisoners from different state facilities. Day four: We feature call-ins from male prisoners across the state of Virginia. Then we close out the final day as we began the first, with call-ins from our founding members. We have received many positive feedback from the public here at home and abroad. To date, Second Chance Quest has witnessed the parole of several of its facilitators and graduates within the past three years.

Do join SCQ, a nonprofit organization to aid us in bringing about the much needed changes to our criminal justice system. You can make a difference, never underestimate the power of common folks.

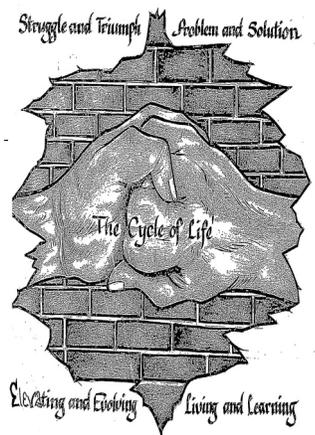
Our motto here at SCQ is: "The ends you serve that are selfish will take you no farther than yourself, but the ends you serve that are for all in common, will take you into eternity." (Marcus Garvey)

Mr. T. Bravo
President SCQ

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The Second Chance Quest Support Group



Pradia, Pardoned in Cocaine Case, Appointed to Virginia Parole Board



Kemba Smith Pradia

Kemba Smith Pradia, a Richmond native who served more than six years of a 24 1/2-years federal prison sentence before she was pardoned by President Bill Clinton, was appointed to the Virginia Parole Board. Prior to the appointment, Pradia was the state advocacy campaign's director with the ACLU of Virginia.

Pradia, the author of "Poster Child: The Kemba Smith Story," has been a national advocate for sentencing reform and a consultant on the criminal justice system for over 20 years. According to Gov. Ralph Northam's office, Pradia has worked with officials at the White House, the United Nations

in Geneva, Switzerland, and members of Congress, and has led training for federal and state probation organizations across the country.

She has served on the Virginia Criminal Sentencing Commission since 2015. Pradia graduated from Virginia Union University with a bachelor of social work degree and is a native of Richmond, where she lives.

In 1994, when she was 24, Pradia, who had no prior criminal record, was sentenced to 24 1/2 years in prison after getting caught up in the crack-dealing activities of her boyfriend, who was later murdered. In 2000, Pradia became a focal point of a

national campaign against federal mandatory sentencing laws in crack-trafficking cases because her long, no-parole sentence contrasted with her youth, previously clean record and wholesome background.

Her case was often referred to as "Kemba's Nightmare" after a national publication used that headline. Pradia's lawyers appealed her conviction, but it was upheld in the courts. In 2000, with support growing nationwide, lawyers turned to seeking a White House pardon, and Clinton granted her executive clemency. Her voting rights were restored in 2012.

Pradia is replacing Jean W. Cunningham, who is retiring from the five-member parole board. (Richmond Times-Dispatch)



News



Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam has restored voting rights and other civil rights to more than 22,000 felons who have completed their sentences since taking office last year. Northam announced the milestone in an interview. The rights include the right to vote, serve on a jury and run for public office.

His predecessor, former Gov. Terry McAuliffe, made undoing a vestige of the state's Jim Crow era and restoring voting a hallmark of his term in office and restored the rights of more than 170,000 felons.

Virginia is one of a handful of states that permanently limit the civil rights of people convicted of a felony barring gubernatorial intervention.

Virginia's Attorney General is leading a charge to decriminalize, and eventually legalize, the use of small amounts of recreational marijuana. Attorney General Mark

Herring has stated that prosecuting marijuana possession cases is costing the state money that could be better spent elsewhere. Moreover, Herring believes that prosecuting marijuana cases is needlessly creating criminals and disproportionately affecting African Americans. He asserts that "Overall arrests for marijuana possession have increased by about 115%, from about 13,000 in 2003 to nearly 28,000 in 2017. The number of first-time marijuana convictions in Virginia has also rise dramatically, from 6,500 in 2008 to 10,000 in 2017 and that those arrested are overwhelmingly African American."

Herring has his detractors, however, opponents of legalization are concerned that the use of marijuana could have an impact on impaired driving, the development of children and on opioid abuse, with reported

cases of people lacing pot with other drugs, such as fentanyl. Dana Schrad, executive director for the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police, said her organization cannot support a push to decriminalize the drug. "It's a great deal of conflict for law enforcement to have decriminalization at the state level when something is still against the law in federal criminal code," Schrad said.

Herring believes steps should be taken to first decriminalize simple possession of small amounts of the drug and address past convictions. Then, he said, attention can turn to laying down the groundwork for legalization. The Republican dominated General Assembly has killed a member of legalization bills in the last few years, though if the composition of the General Assembly changes after the 2020 elections, there may be a chance. (Continued page 6)

RIGHT=VOTE

Voices From Behind The Wall

"My name is Amin, I was born in Kingston, Jamaica. I came to America in 2001 with the hope and dream of a better life. I strongly had the desire to help my family back home in Jamaica. With that said, when I was a kid growing up in Jamaica I always felt something was wrong with me, psychologically. I could feel it in every fiber of my body. Years went by, and as I got older I would question things I shouldn't have because I wasn't sure of myself. However, because of fear, pride and the humiliation of being laughed at, I didn't tell anyone what I was feeling on the inside.

There were signs but my family would chalk it up as bad habits, not knowing that these were signs of abnormal behaviors. I finally realized I was causing myself a lot of pain because I wasn't able to accept the fact that I had mental problems and needed help.

Due to lack of treatment, I kept failing in life, I failed in school, and I failed in my marriage. I didn't have a substance abuse problem, nor did my parents. The only thing that had a negative effect on me as a child was growing up without my dad, he wasn't there to teach me certain things. He was a part of my life growing up, but he was not involved on a daily basis because he and my mom were separated when I was 7 years old.

Things became unbearable for me as I became older, I didn't want to live anymore, I didn't value my life so, I turned to crime with the hope that I would be killed. Since being locked up, I've learned a lot of things about myself and mental health, things that have eluded me for years. I now know that there wasn't anything normal about the thoughts I've entertained and things I've done. It's quite funny how things turn out at times, it took prison for my

eyes to be opened and to be able to admit, I have mental health problems and I need help. I'm now in treatment and getting better daily."

By: Mr. Amin

"Words of Wisdom"

Take pride in your culture, and ancestry; through those discoveries of who you are, you will begin to grow and develop a sense of balance and tranquility in life. Your family, and those around you deserve nothing less than a man's behavior from you. In that, what you say, you live by. People will always remember your inconsistencies in your speeches and actions. A man is measured primarily according to whether or not he takes responsibility for his own actions, if he fails in that regard, then his character is lacking "integrity" and he has failed as a man.

Be patient, be observant and surround yourself with people who live with honor, respect, and loyalty.

By: Demon

"Commitment- The word commitment encompasses dedication as well as application. The word commitment far exceeds just verbally announcing one's intent, it delves deeper into the core of your being. Commitment requires a genuine change from within.

Change - Change can and will only happen, once we individually reach a point or place where we decide and realize that a change in our lives is necessary.

Discipline - In order to achieve your goals and be seen as being a responsible person, one must develop discipline and self-control. Having discipline is a characteristic that is necessary to incorporate in your arsenal if one plans to succeed in life."

By: "Jay"

"Over the years of my incarceration, I've learned quite a bit about myself and life itself. Growing up I was taught discipline through "martial arts", but I never fully appreciated it until I applied patience and tolerance in my day-to-day life. Because all three of those disciplines goes hand-in-hand; the same way you can't have loyalty to someone without loving them, it just won't work.

Since turning 24 years old, I have made a commitment to change. I have done 4 years of long-term segregation, and so, stability is prominent overall. I had to have a stable mind to come to terms with all of these things and to diagnose myself being that there was no one there. I was one of the lucky ones to see those things and work on them. Because, when we're in the streets we tend to spoil ourselves, and our tolerance and patience is short lived when it comes to getting what we want.

I just hope others can see the errors of their ways and keep striving for greatness, such as I have. I'll never be perfect, but steadily striving to be better, still a work in progress.

By: Juice (aka, O.J.)

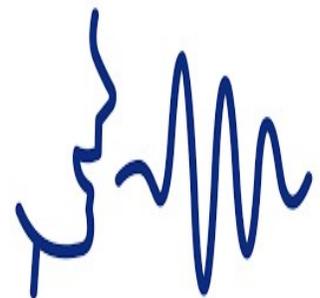
Virginia Parole Reinstatement?

Parole needs to be reinstated in Virginia. When the state sends a man to prison with nothing to look forward to, he becomes no good to himself nor to those around him. Locking up a human being and throwing away the keys, in reality is destroying all hope for that man or woman to redeem themselves and is a disservice to all humanity.

From my personal experience of being incarcerated, there's a prevailing feeling among convicts, that the



RAISE YOUR VOICE



Voices From Behind The Wall (Cont.)

VOICES

judicial system doesn't believe that people can change and live crime free lives upon their release. Let me be the first to say, some people have learned their lesson and are rehabilitated.

I personally believe that the justice system don't care whether a person is guilty or innocent, they will lock you up and put you on trial, even if they (prosecutors) have their doubts as to ones guilt. All

they seem to care about is the win. The public should be very skeptical about our justice system. Case and point, if an outstanding law-abiding citizen is charged with a crime, in court, he or she will be paraded in front of a jury as a career criminal and the worst human being on the planet. Why is that? We can further take into account the length of time vetted out to first-time offenders in nonviolent cases, some

are serving decades and even life behind bars.

Our justice system has developed into a major business enterprise with an annual budget of \$80 billion. Given that, it is crystal clear that their concern for our communities seem to take a backseat when it comes to corporate profit making.

By: Mr. R. Bernard

Second Chance Quest Support Group Students' Perspective



"The Second Chance Quest Support Group has helped me see my situation differently. I previously thought I was alone, waiting for the many obstacles to come my way, left to figure out how to hurdle over them on my own. From day one in the group, I realized I was wrong about being alone. I found support and help immediately. I learned about different cultures and saw that my culture wasn't the only one that suffers. But most importantly, this group has taught me commitment.

Second Chance Quest Support Group has shown me that change starts with commitment. One has to commit to change. After all, commitment is only trying and not giving up no matter what obstacles are placed in your path. Change will come eventually if you commit yourself. It doesn't come by accident, you have to want it enough to make it happen. It is mandatory that we change our lives to succeed in the world and become productive. Change takes discipline!"

By: "Mr. P"

"Along with the Second Chance Quest Support Group Daily Principles, I believe commitment, change, discipline, patience, stability and

tolerance are also all acts, principles and state of behavior that I'm battle tested with daily through my journey of life. With these words and SCQ six daily principles (Respect, Unity, Confidentiality, Understanding, Integrity, and Education), Second Chance Quest has enlightened and educated me to grow and elevate myself from being a statistic of arrested development. Through this eventful and historical cycle of life, learning and building to reach manhood, we all have some percentage of these words (principles) embedded into our structure of character. It may not be a high percentage, but it can be worked on to increase.

We all want a better quality of life, or else, we wouldn't be in Second Chance Quest Support Group. With our existence comes personal and societal barriers and the only way to show our elevation and growth is to upgrade our way of thinking. In order to change, we have a responsibility to think before we act.

Our thoughts and actions becomes our legacy. Our actions form a structure, piece by piece that is either upright or crooked. So it is in our best interest to keep our character and values intact, meeting every situation with solid integrity and generous

humanity."

By: D. Cusick

"Going into the program (Second Chance Quest Support Group) raises sentiments of curiosity, optimism, and uncertainty. While I can't speak for no one else I have to suspect many of us shared these feelings because of the expectations of a group setting. A group setting implying some exposure to not only a person's deepest thoughts but also, the uncovering of emotions and events that we work diligently to suppress.

In order to make a formidable effort towards change, I had to confront those imperfections of insecurities and allow the process to take its course. Trying to remember the target words or principles (i.e., Respect, Unity, Confidentiality, Understanding, Integrity, and Education) that the program implements requires a certain level of discipline because they provide clarity to many of our occurrences, and also, direction in those moments of indecision. I have utilized this program as a means to reprogram myself from old habits to more productive ones. Using this program as an excuse to





SECOND CHANCE QUEST 2nd Annual Membership Drive

SCQ'S - "PRISON" MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

Greetings, Second Chance Quest Supporters:

Good news! You now have the opportunity to become an official member of Second Chance Quest. We are approaching our 2nd Annual Membership Drive. For an annual donation of \$10.00 you can become a member of SCQ.

Here are some of the benefits of becoming a member of SCQ:

- **Four (4) issues of Second Chance Quest Newsletters per year**
 - **Sign up before February and receive a bonus newsletter!**
- **Email Access to Second Chance Quest Head Office**
- **Receive Periodic Updates to all Second Chance Quest Activities and Annual Social Media Take-Over**
- **Afforded access in having your short stories and/or articles published in SCQ's Newsletter - deemed appropriate**
- **Members will be afforded Second Chance Quest's organizational support in valid grievances - if deemed members' grievance warrants SCQ's backing.**

You, as a member, have the full weight of this not-for-profit organization on your side and in your corner - for life!

BECOME A MEMBER TODAY!

Yours Truly,
T. Bravo
SCQ President

To register as a member, fill out this form mail to PO Box 855, Maplewood, NJ 07040. Must include \$10 donation.

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Second Chance Quest Support Group Student's Perspective (Cont.)

welcome the opportunity to learn different cultures, geographies, and opposite personalities. This process has established a commitment to complete the course and to have patience as I transition into the new me."

By: Mr. S. James (aka "Shaheed")

"The first time I heard about Second Chance Quest program was from one of the mentors. He spotted me in the hallway and asked me if I would like to join. After he explained the program to me, I knew right then it was either going to be a waste of my time or a good learning experience to use in life. I told him if he could get me into the program I was willing to be apart of the group.

Once the first class started, I told myself I could tolerate this class. As the weeks passed and the mentors delve into different topics, it grew on me that this was the change I needed. And so, I made the commitment to complete this program.

I feel this Second Chance Quest program has allowed and helped me to change myself, and my way of thinking. I didn't think it was possible. I actually came to that realization when a mentor passed around the questionnaire sheets we completed before joining the program. I was taken aback, my outlook and my thought process was totally different from what it is now.

Before being accepted into the program, I was struggling to find some way to occupy my time, educationally. My mother told me, 'Son just be patient and good things will follow.' I took those words and did my best to follow them. Once I got that into my mind and practice patience, this pro-

gram fell into my lap."

By: "Demon"

"What has Second Chance Quest done for me? For the most part, Second Chance Quest has taught me to be tolerant with the things and people I don't understand nor agree with. In knowing that, I've chosen to fully participate in this program in the hope that it will assist me in my 'self-transformation'.

It is said that the only 'constant' is change! This class has done one major important thing for me, it has allowed me to share my life experiences in a group setting. We will never know if we can make a change if we refuse to give ourselves a chance.

By: J. Williams (aka S.K.E.)

"My journey through the Second Chance Quest Support Group has made me reflect on my lifestyle, good and bad. Usually, people including myself travel through life not truly committing to anything in particular. I've come to realize that without truly committing I will never truly achieve my goals.

First and foremost, I ponder and think a lot about changes, big and small. However, I personally lacked the application and dedication to fully apply myself to change. And so, I've taken the initiative to undergo this journey through the Second Chance Quest Support Group. I've come to realize that individual struggles don't have to be an individual struggle when one has brothers willing to help you overcome them.

Being a member of a progressive support group helps us to tolerate different cultures, different people. Being able to tolerate and

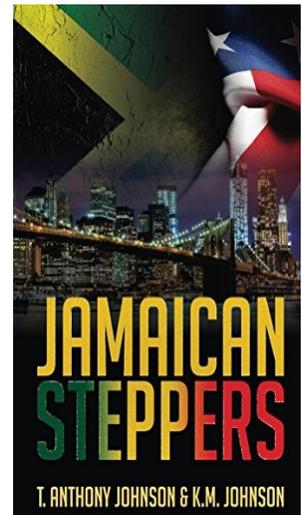
understand different perspectives is important and meaningful in society.

The Second Chance Quest Support Group has helped me to understand and use what I know to understand people in different shoes. Positive energy started the day I entered the Second Chance Quest Support Group, now I am able to grasp a hold of my future plans and attitude toward friends and families."

By: Mr. T. Jones

"What the Second Chance Quest Support Group has done for me is allow me the opportunity to surround myself with like-minded individuals. I believe that following the Six Daily Principles, as taught by the group, will help a man survive in the prison environment and be a better person outside of prison.

In week 1, I learned about the support group and how it was established. Week 2, was centered around people of different cultures. This was most helpful for me because the majority of the prison population grew up in a different culture than myself. Thanks to practicing respect and understanding, I can better interact with those who are different from me. Weeks 3 and 4 was important to me because it reinforced my will to never come back to prison.



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Prison Reform

Second Chance Quest Support Group Student's Perspective (Cont.)

All and all, being a part of this support group has been a great benefit for me."

By: Mr. J. Westinghouse

"In the beginning I let this time do me, I had no desire for life and no expectations for living any kind of productive or meaningful incarceration. I was, for all accounts and purposes, dead. Then, I woke up from the nightmarish existence I had engulfed myself in. I realized I was wasting what was actually a 'golden

opportunity', although forced and not the most desirable form.

The culmination of my efforts led me to the ultimate finale in regaining my life, Second Chance Quest Support Group. Here I would learn the seriousness of my actions and the commitment needed to build a brighter future. Also, be equipped with the necessary discipline and patience I would need to lead a productive life, in and out of prison. In prison, I had to deal with quite a few unbearable situations. However, I now have the necessary tools to best tolerate those things if pre-

mented to me in the future, as oppose to lashing out.

Patience, above all, has helped me gain the discipline to sustain my commitment to change. With great feelings of gratitude for the lessons and knowledge passed on to me, I am continually nurtured from the cornerstone of granite that are the mentors of the Second Chance Quest Support Group."

By: Mr. E. Meadows, Jr.



NEWS (Cont.)

Drug Courts Funded by State

The announcement from the state Supreme Court said drug courts in Tazewell, Russell, Buchanan, Dickerson and several other counties in Virginia would be continuously funded. Tazewell joins 14 other communities being funded by the state.

Drug courts currently serve 1.5 million people nationwide, said Circuit Court Judge Jack S. Hurley Jr. Drug Courts have been studied more than any judicial process that has ever happened, and they work. Hurley stated that, "they reduce recidivism 58% and the cost of drug court is between \$9,000 and \$16,000 compared to an average of \$25-31,000 for incarceration." Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney Katie Gallagher echoed Hurley's statements and said the program changes people's

lives.

Low Unemployment Creates 'Most Felony-Friendly Time'

William Troutman Jr., 46, got his second chance at a recycling center. He started as a picker on the presort line, then he got his forklift certification. He was recently promoted and makes \$10.50 per hour working the floor where recycled material gets compressed and shipped away.

"This place opened the doors when they didn't have to for a lot of offenders, and opening doors really gives offenders a new light," he said. Troutman said he first became involved in the justice system at 16 in the early 1990s.

Last year, he was caught selling drugs to make money to get out of medical debt from a collapsed lung. He was convicted of unlawful possession of a firearm by a felon. "It wasn't right, but it was a choice I

made on my own," he said. After his trial last month, Troutman will serve four years of house arrest and two years of probation. That won't keep him from working at Ray's Trash Service.

In a tight hiring market from low unemployment, more ex-offenders such as Troutman are finding jobs than before. Scott Whiting, the Indianapolis branch manager of Allegiance Staffing, said more employers are embracing the labor source. "This is the most felony-friendly time in my 20 years of doing this work," said Gregg Keesling, president of Recycling Force, a business that specifically hires ex-offenders.

Wages are on par with those without a criminal record, said Lena Hackett, president of Community Solutions. Those who have been incarcerated can expect to make the minimum wage \$7.25 an hour up to \$16 per hour. At Public Advocates in Commu-



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MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

SPONSORS

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SCQ'S - "PRISON" MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

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- Email Access to Second Chance Quest Head Office
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- Afforded access in having your short stories and/or articles published in SCQ's Newsletter - deemed appropriate

Members will be afforded Second Chance Quest's organizational support on valid grievances - if deemed members' grievance warrants SCQ's backing.

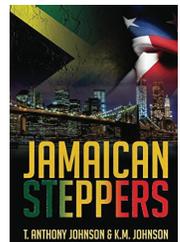
You, as a member, have the full weight of this not-for-profit organization on your side and in your corner - for life!

SECOND CHANCE QUEST - "REGULAR" MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

For an annual fee of \$50.00. As a new member, you will receive the following:

- A complimentary SCQ T-Shirt
- Official member-only access via our website
- Four (4) issues of SCQ's Newsletters per year
- Priority and Discount rates to all SCQ Events/Functions

We encourage you to join us as we work diligently to bring about positive changes to our criminal justice system through the mentoring of both those who are incarcerated and the children of the incarcerated. Join us by becoming a life-long member as we rise to the challenges of reducing mass incarceration. We are tackling this challenge on both fronts, (at home and in the prisons).



NEWS (Cont.)

nity Re-entry or PACE, Executive Director Rhiannon Edwards said open jobs and employers looking for ex-offenders far outnumber the number of prepared candidates, nearly triple what it was three years ago.

Why employers turn to ex-offenders?

It's a stark shift from when the organization, which primarily works with people with a record of felony or multiple misdemeanors, struggle to match ex-offenders with jobs. With the support of the Indy Chamber, PACE has had the luxury of primarily placing ex-offenders in jobs that pay above minimum wage, Edwards said.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Indianapolis, Carmel and Anderson unemployment rate is about 3%, a significant decrease from five years ago when the rate was closer to 6%. In jails and prisons, Indiana incarcerated population is growing. According to a report from Vera Institute

of Justice, the nation prison population decreased by 1.3% from 2017 to 2018. But in Indiana, the population increased by 3.3%.

Hackett said many employers are willing to look past charges such as possession of drugs, minor assaults, driving under the influence and public intoxication. "It really becomes a barometer of how long it has been since then and what you've done since then," Hackett said. However, not all employers have found successful employees or been able to accommodate the challenges of hiring the formerly incarcerated.

(Source, USA TODAY)



Get involved.

Members and Volunteers

Dear Members/Volunteers,

Thank you for your unwavering support of Second Chance Quest. To all volunteer writers of our newsletter, we sincerely thank you for sacrificing your time and energy in writing and sharing your most inner thoughts with us and the public. We assure you, the public is listening. Please continue to share your thoughts with us as we continue to publish your articles in our newsletter.

Do forward all articles; poems, essays, art work, etc. to our main office.

As you are well aware, Second Chance Quest is a nonprofit organization. We encourage your financial support. Our doors continue to be open due to your generous financial contributions. We thank those who have given and we encourage those who haven't to step up to the plate and do the right thing. I'm sure we can all agree, "it's fine time we do for

us." "Us" meaning, everyone who is striving to better themselves and our society.

Kindest regards,
SCQ Board

Second Chance Quest
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It's Never Too Late To Make A Difference!