

OVERVIEW

A groundbreaking and independent impact study by MDRC finds that the Center for Employment Opportunities' (CEO) Returning Citizens Stimulus (RCS) program significantly reduced parole violations in the year following release from incarceration—and in some cases, up to 18 months after release—despite the program lasting only 60 days. Launched at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the RCS program provided up to \$2,750 in cash assistance to formerly incarcerated people in 28 cities nationwide. Participants received three payments over a period of 60 days upon completion of personalized milestones, such as preparing a resume to support their journey toward stability and employment. This new evaluation focuses on outcomes for individuals released in Los Angeles and Alameda counties in California.

KEY FINDINGS

- Parole violations were **reduced by over 41% within the first 6 months post-release**. (8% of RCS participants had parole violations vs. 14% of comparison group members).
- Violent parole violations **dropped by 64%** in the same period. (0.99% of RCS participants had parole violations vs. 2.77% of comparison group members)
- Young adults (ages 18–24) demonstrated a **33% reduction in violent parole violations at 12 month follow up**.
- **80% of participants** met their program milestones and received the full three payments.
- **Impact lasted up to 12 months**, with some evidence suggesting a trend toward **reduced reincarceration at 18 months**.
- Over **60%** of participants used RCS money to buy food and groceries, **57%** spent money on regular expenses such as rent, utilities, and transportation, and over **20%** on credit card and medical bills.

WHY THIS MATTERS

The period immediately following release is vulnerable for people returning from incarceration. 40% of justice-impacted people experience joblessness over multiple years, live with food insecurity at twice the rate of the general population, and are seven times more likely to be unhoused. RCS participants overwhelmingly used the cash assistance for essential needs: food, rent, transportation, and bills demonstrating the importance of a financially sound foundation to build stability and thrive.

Parole and probation violations accounted for 27% of all admissions to state and federal prisons in 2025. The significant results of RCS in reducing parole violations should signal to lawmakers that if implemented, direct cash assistance could lead to a decrease in the incarcerated population. It's clear that providing cash assistance is a net benefit for the economy and for the wellbeing of communities.

"Every person deserves a fair chance—and that starts with real, tangible assistance the moment they return from incarceration."

-Sam Schaeffer, CEO & Executive Director - Center for Employment Opportunities