

JOTF JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 181

Qualifying Nonprofit Organizations - Training and Reentry Services - Funding

TO: Hon. Guy Guzzone, Chair, and Members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

FROM: Job Opportunities Task Force

DATE: January 17, 2024

The Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) is an independent, nonprofit organization that develops and advocates policies and programs to increase the skills, job opportunities, and incomes of low-skill, low-wage workers and job seekers in Maryland. JOTF supports Senate Bill 181 to provide grants to certain qualifying nonprofit organizations for the purpose of providing training in automotive repair to incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals and creates an appropriation for the purposes of funding the grant program.

The data on returning citizens clearly displays a troubling pattern between a lack of employment opportunities and increased recidivism rates for returning citizens. The 2021 Brookings Report, *A Better Path Forward for Criminal Justice: Training and Employment for Correctional Populations*, concluded that having a job reduces recidivism and individuals are less likely to commit crimes when they have stable, full-time employment. This national trend is consistent within Maryland as well. According to the Maryland State Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services annual report on recidivism covering FY2022, recidivism is highest in the first year following release and approximately halves with each continued year after incarceration. However, the Incarceration to Employment report released by the Biden administration states that, "... formerly incarcerated persons have a 27 percent unemployment rate, exponentially higher than the overall United States unemployment rate." There is a clear and urgent need for expanded employment opportunities for returning citizens to lower Maryland's recidivism rate.

Senate Bill 181 helps to address that issue by expanding workforce development and employment options for returning citizens. Providing grant funding to qualified nonprofit organizations will allow for returning citizens to receive critical job training and reentry services from qualified providers and expands their access to a career field that provides living wages. This program will benefit Maryland by providing a path for returning citizens to reintegrate within the workforce, which strengthens the economy by both allowing them to be full participants within the economy as both taxpayers and consumers. It is also a benefit to public safety by providing legitimate avenues to self-sustaining employment, eliminating the need for returning citizens to continue to engage in illegal activities out of desperation. JOTF asserts that if Maryland is to improve its public safety and regional economy, it must continue to invest in services for returning citizens that allow them to be full participants in the Maryland economy. Senate Bill 181 is an important step toward achieving this outcome.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 181.

For more information, contact: Kam Bridges/Senior Public Policy Advocate/Kam@jotf.org