



*Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes*

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1553 :**  
**Identification Cards and Driver's License Renewals - Inmates**

TO: Hon. Kumar Barve, Chair, and Members of the House Environment & Transportation Committee

FROM: Christopher Dews, Policy Advocate

DATE: March 6th, 2020

The Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) is an independent, nonprofit organization that promotes improved economic opportunities for low-income workers and job-seekers who are returning to society. JOTF supports House Bill 1553 as a means to ensure state-issued identification upon release *knowing* that this will be one less barrier for returning citizens finding sustainable employment.

In Maryland, approximately 15,000 prisoners are released from incarceration each year. Many have little or *no* traditional work experience, and most read at or below a third-grade level when they were incarcerated.

While the possession of a criminal record in and of itself poses a *tremendous barrier* to mainstream employment, the lack of identification documentation makes the task even more difficult. Birth certificates, social security cards, and other vital documents are often misplaced or lost, especially when transitioning from home to home, and especially when navigating through the criminal justice system. This then leaves most with *no form* of identification upon release.

In the lives of our returning citizens, the events that take place within the first few weeks after release are critical to successful re-entry and preventing recidivism. Without proper identification, people with criminal records are often unable to find employment, secure housing, or apply for public benefits that may be necessary even to obtain medication. And, if they are fortunate enough to find work, the lack of state ID can make it extremely difficult to cash paychecks or even open a bank account.

With such a high number of individuals being released annually from our state and local facilities, transition and reentry services are more important than ever. By working together, the Motor Vehicle Administration and the Department of Corrections can better serve this most vulnerable population and ensure that all have state-issued photo identification when released.

Reacclimating to society is hard enough as it is. Requiring formal identification -a necessary component of being a functioning citizen- removes another roadblock in the way. No one is served when individuals cannot engage in the workforce and remain self-sufficient. For these reasons, we request a favorable vote of House Bill 1553.