

JOTF JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1524:

Procurement and Correctional Facilities - Employment Opportunities for Formerly Incarcerated Individuals

TO: Hon. Shane Pendergrass, Chair, and members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee

FROM: Christopher Dews, Chief Executive Officer

DATE: March 10, 2020

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. We support House Bill 1524 (The Job Opportunities Act) as a means of promoting workers usually locked out of employment due to previous entanglements with the criminal justice system.

Approximately, 1,700 incarcerated individuals have been released from Maryland prisons in recent years due to the Justice Reinvestment Act. While releasing non-violent inmates has been a good first step in reducing our prison population, these formerly incarcerated citizens still remain locked out of the job market. They have indeed served their time and are released only to be penalized again by employers who refuse to hire them because of their criminal record. The near - singular determinant of recidivism is joblessness. While the national average for unemployment in America is at an all-time low - around 4% in 2018 - we know that the unemployment rate for formerly incarcerated individuals nationally is around 27% and can be as high as 40% for those in Maryland.

While most re-entry programs focus on stopping the cycle of crime through training programs that include soft skill training, certifications, interview preparation, and career support, when all is said and done, the formerly incarcerated need actual employment and not more preparation. This should be a priority for the state as, according to research by the Vera Institute in 2017, states that lower recidivism rates by 10% could save millions annually. Specifically, Maryland could save up \$89 Million each year if the prison population is reduced by 10% annually.

House Bill 1524 seeks to address this issue by creating a two-tiered procurement preference program to incentivize the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services contractors to hire more formerly incarcerated people, giving both formerly incarcerated individuals a boost in hiring and then giving contractors who hire the formerly incarcerated a preference in bidding. We cannot begin to talk about reducing crime without setting the stage for reducing recidivism. This bill is a concrete way to support

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formerly incarcerated people's successful re-entry by putting them to work. For those reasons, we respectfully request a favorable report on House Bill 1524.