

JOTF JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 464

Prince George's County – Prince George's County Reentry Employment Incentive Program – Funding

TO: Hon. Chair Barnes, and Members of the House Appropriations Committee

FROM: Christopher Dews, Policy Consultant

Date: February 14th, 2023

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 HB464 as a means of reducing the impact of incarceration and enhancing employment opportunities for lower-income workers and job seekers throughout the state.

A criminal record can be both the cause and consequence of poverty and has detrimental effects on the employment prospects for the [estimated 25% of working-age Marylanders with a record](#) (pg.26). Every year, approximately 15,000 Marylanders are released from state prisons and struggle to secure a job, find a place to live and reenter society. Demographically, [71% of Maryland's prison population is black](#) (pg.20), the highest in the nation, and Prince George's County is home to Maryland's second highest rate of returning citizens. The Department of Justice has [found](#) high recidivism rates among returning citizens, with half of all returning citizens recidivating within three (3) years and 60 percent recidivating within five (5) years. One of the primary drivers of high recidivism rates is the inability of returning citizens to find a job: [over 60 percent of formerly incarcerated persons remain unemployed](#) one year after their release. This is mainly due to the fact that more than [85% of employers perform background checks on all of their job applicants](#) and deny employment to many returning citizens on the basis of a record. A past criminal conviction of any sort reduces job offers by half. This leaves many of the 1.5 million Marylanders with a criminal record out in the cold when trying to obtain gainful employment. A 2015 Manhattan Institute study [revealed](#) that employment, especially within the first six months of release, drastically lowers the likelihood of recidivism for nonviolent offenders.

Unfortunately, Maryland has longer waiting periods for expungement than most other states. [Maryland Code Ann., Criminal Procedure §10–110](#) states that an individual must wait **10 years** before they are eligible to expunge most *nonviolent* misdemeanor convictions from their record, **15 years** for a common-law battery or 2nd-degree assault conviction, and **15 years** for a non-violent felony. The waiting period kicks in *after* they have completed their entire sentence, parole or probation, drug treatment, *and* any mandatory supervision. In most instances, the waiting periods are *far* longer than the actual sentence,

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leaving individuals released from incarceration with barriers to education, employment, housing, public assistance, occupational licensing, and much more.

House Bill 464 seeks to address barriers to employment due to a criminal record by including an appropriation of \$500,000 in the annual budget bill for the Prince George's County Re-entry Employment Incentive Program- which subsidizes the wages for employers who hire returning citizens. JOTF sees this as a brilliant move to support the re-entry community, strengthen businesses, and improve the overall economy of Prince George's County. We urge a favorable report on House Bill 464.