

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 2, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-221, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leader Schumer:

Roughly 600,000 people¹ are released from state and federal prisons every year and one in three Americans have a criminal legal record². This involvement with the justice system creates significant barriers to finding employment. Prior to COVID-19, formerly incarcerated individuals had a twenty-seven percent unemployment rate³, a rate almost double the peak unemployment for the general population during the pandemic. Communities of color are disproportionately impacted by the criminal legal system and those disparities persist upon return to their communities – with formerly incarcerated Black men unemployed at over thirty-five percent and formerly incarcerated Black women at over forty-three percent⁴. Those already facing obstacles to opportunity are often hardest hit during economic downturn and left behind as the economy recovers.

While a number of factors affect recidivism, the single largest determinant of rearrest and reconviction is whether a person is able to find and maintain employment. Returning citizens and justice-involved individuals face unique challenges on the road to stable employment and require targeted workforce development and reentry supports that address these specific barriers. Investments in these programs are not just a benefit to those that they serve. The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world and this cycle of recidivism is costing taxpayers more than eighty billion dollars a year⁵. It is clear that investing in workforce development, career pathways, and reentry support for justice involved individuals is not only the right thing to do but it is the smart thing to do.

We were pleased that President Biden made providing workforce development and employment for justice-involved individuals a priority in the American Jobs Plan. We urge you to increase the amount of federal reentry funding for the current workforce development system to meet the need and demand for these programs:

- Increase funding for Second Chance Act programs to assist states in providing critical services – including employment training and assistance, education, housing, family programs, and substance use disorder treatment for those leaving incarceration.

¹ <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/p19.pdf>

² <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/just-facts-many-americans-have-criminal-records-college-diplomas>

³ <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/outofwork.html>

⁴ <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/outofwork.html>

⁵ <https://bjs.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh236/files/media/document/jeeus17.pdf>

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- Make significant increases to funding for existing American workforce development and education investments for justice impacted individuals under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014, including dedicated funding for the Department of Labor's (DOL) Reentry Employment Opportunities (REO) program.
- Invest in evidence-based community violence prevention programs that support and expand access to reentry supports and career pathway workforce development opportunities for individuals impacted by the criminal legal system.
- Increase funding for state-based automatic criminal record-clearing initiatives, including record sealing and expungement, that efficiently eliminate the history of a criminal record as a barrier to employment, education, and housing.

As Congress advances the American Jobs Plan through budget reconciliation, it will provide tremendous opportunity – but we must ensure that these investments and America's economic recovery is truly inclusive. Increasing investments in programs that connect justice-involved individuals with support and opportunity would help ensure that individuals with criminal legal histories achieve long-term reentry success. Additionally, American businesses would benefit from increased access to qualified workers to fill available jobs and address the workforce shortage in a range of sectors, including manufacturing, health care, STEM, and clean energy. Studies have repeatedly shown that justice-involved individuals who attain stable jobs are less likely to recidivate, leading to stronger communities, safer neighborhoods, and an economy that works for everyone.

We thank you for your leadership and look forward to working with you to ensure an equitable recovery and the resources necessary to provide reentry services to improve outcomes and provide true second chances for justice-impacted individuals.

Sincerely,



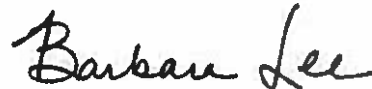
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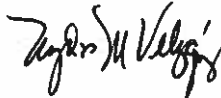
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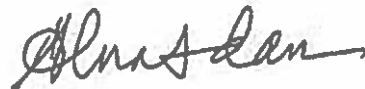
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