

# MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



## ***Focus Group: Employment For Those In Maryland's Criminal Justice System***

### Participants:

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- *Jennifer Masslieno, Senior Program Director for Volunteers of America – Chesapeake Re-entry Center*
- *Sonji Roach, Accountability Specialist, Volunteers of America - Chesapeake Reentry Center*
- *Diamonte Brown, Out for Justice - Director*
- *Phil Caroom (Facilitator), MAJR Coordinating Council*
- *Barbara Thomas, Recorder*

1. EMPLOYMENT AS PRIORITY. **Status quo:** Marylanders who have any criminal convictions, even without incarceration, often have difficulty finding employment. Inmates, upon release, have even greater difficulties finding employment.

**Recommendation:** Because employment is a “protective factor,” reducing the likelihood of repeat offenses by approximately 50%, Maryland should offer reentry assistance for inmates to find transitional employment upon their release. And, Maryland should seek ways to encourage employers and employment programs to hire those with criminal records.

2. RECRUITING OF EMPLOYERS. **Status quo:** Currently, reentry programs must solicit and educated individual employers, seeking ones who may agree to hire those with a criminal record.

**Recommendation:** Maryland state government should establish programs to officially and comprehensively inform all employers of possible tax credits, “enterprise zone benefits,” federal bonding, and other programs. For convenience, MD employer packets should be made available for use by county reentry centers, as well as private reentry and employment assistance programs.

3. “ALL OF THE ABOVE” EMPLOYMENT STRATEGIES. **Status quo:** Currently, Maryland programs for reentry and ex-offenders’ employment lack an ongoing statewide network to strategize on best methods to obtain employment opportunities for their participants.

**Recommendation:** Maryland state government should sponsor periodic conferences and other ongoing resources to assist state and local reentry programs to coordinate and share employment development resources.

Preliminary discussions suggest that best options may include: employer education as to benefits of hiring qualified ex-offenders, social enterprise employers with specific goals to assist ex-offenders, and support for family / friends businesses that may offer jobs. Good models of social enterprise employers in Maryland include the Humanim group, the "2 A.M. Bakery," "Keepin' It Clean" catering, the Light House BEST catering program, and others.

Mentoring ex-offenders to become self-employed entrepreneurs is reportedly a long-term solution for particular individuals; however, start-up times may be too lengthy and actual earned income too delayed for most reentry programs of 6 months or less.

For the most difficult to employ, in-house options such as employment within the institution or within the reentry facility may be offered. Local government sponsored employment such as Baltimore's Youthworks also should be considered. <https://youthworks.oedworks.com/>

4. **TRANSPORTATION FOR EMPLOYMENT. Status quo:** Transportation to employment often presents difficulties for ex-offenders in reentry programs and can prevent them from maintaining employment.

**Recommendation:** Maryland and local reentry programs should consider including some form(s) of transitional transportation assistance to increase ex-offenders' chances for employment success. Bus passes, vouchers or, in rural jurisdictions, shuttles may be worthwhile investments.

5. **HIGHER RISK INMATES. Status quo:** Inmates who are high risk, violent offenders or sex offenders may present special difficulties unless particular assistance is offered. Failure to offer such assistance may increase risks of recidivism, new offenses, and increase taxpayer costs for renewed incarceration.

**Recommendation:** GPS monitoring can be provided at \$4-\$7 per day for a sex offender or for a reentering individual for whom there are concerns about cooperation. More intensive supervision, counseling, and prompt proportional responses to misconduct are needed for these inmates.