

# JOTF JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

*Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes*

## **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1463:**

Reentry Success Act of 2020

**TO:** Chairman. Luke Clippinger, and members of the House Judiciary Committee

**FROM:** Derrell Frazier, Policy Advocate

**DATE:** March 6, 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 812 as a means to ensure that those formerly incarcerated individuals are provided with the skills and resources needed to ensure their successful transition upon release.

Each year in Maryland, approximately 36,000 people are incarcerated at a cost of more than \$1 billion per year according to an analysis by the Justice Policy Institute and the Vera Institute of Justice. When these individuals are released from incarceration, they face a myriad of challenges, including a lack of affordable housing, legal challenges, health issues, and the inability to meet basic needs, such as clothing and food. Securing meaningful employment is one of the greatest challenges faced by returning citizens, and in many ways, the most important to overcome. According to the Urban Institute's Justice Policy Center, formerly incarcerated individuals who obtained employment and earned higher wages shortly after their release were far less likely to reoffend during the first year than those who did not.

One of the best ways to ensure that someone is successful upon release from incarceration is to provide education, resources and a reentry plan during incarceration, or "inside the fence." A research report entitled "A Released plan for Successful reentry" published by the Urban Institute Justice Policy Institute in September 2008 indicate strong positive outcomes for individuals who participate in a comprehensive, holistic approach to reentry planning—addressing the needs of the incarcerated persons from the moment of admission through the months following release—is clearly the "gold standard". Without access to food, clothing, shelter, transportation, personal identification, and other key necessities, former inmates may see no other option than to return to illegal activities in order to meet their needs. The purpose of this reentry planning is to provide the specific elements that together embody thoughtful and effective inmate release procedures, including considerations such as photo identification, transportation, gate money, public assistance access, prescription drug needs, health referrals, housing arrangements, and substance abuse treatment.

HB 1463 seeks to require the Division of Corrections to acquire and keep on file specified documents for an inmate; provide screening for and access to specified private mediation; provide specified forms to and work with an inmate to ensure the availability of specified documents and benefits at the time of an inmate's

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release from confinement; and provide specified documents such as identification card, birth certificate, social security card and transit pass.

JOTF strongly supports any legislation that encourages a restructuring of the criminal justice system to ensure that all Marylanders are capable of successfully re-entering their communities and gain employment. Additionally, JOTF supports legislation that restructures practices and policies that disproportionately impact the low-wage job seekers of Maryland. We believe that what is proposed in House Bill 1463 is a significant step towards ensuring that inmates who are released have a fighting chance at employment and working wages. For these reasons, we urge a **favorable** report of this bill.