



A CALL TO ACTION

Quick Guide to Hiring Returning Citizens

Benefits, Resources, and Programs



GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE

Regional business leaders creating a better tomorrow...today.

A GUIDE PREPARED BY THE GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE
COALITION FOR A SECOND CHANCE

Letter from Donald C. Fry



Fall 2017

Each year, an estimated 10,000 men and women are released from incarceration and return to Baltimore, often to the very neighborhoods where they resided prior to being arrested.

The majority of these returning citizens have no interest in getting involved in criminal activity again. However, many face nearly insurmountable barriers to successful reentry into the community, including a lack of stable housing, food, and the skills needed to obtain meaningful employment. Research has shown that landing a job as soon as possible after being released from incarceration is one of the keys to avoiding recidivism.

In 2016, the Greater Baltimore Committee established the Coalition for a Second Chance, a group of 24 experts from the public and private sectors charged with examining barriers to employment for returning citizens, as well as other policy issues surrounding reentry. Last winter, the Coalition released its report containing a number of recommendations for improving job prospects for returning citizens and generally ensuring their success upon leaving incarceration.

Over the course of the coalition's work, it became evident that one of the biggest opportunities to help returning citizens centered around ensuring employers understand the benefits of hiring these individuals. There are numerous myths about returning citizens and what they are capable of accomplishing. This guide is intended to be a first step educating business how they can benefit from hiring returning citizens.

Please feel free to reach out to me personally if you would like to discuss any of the information included in this Quick Guide. I appreciate your interest in this important effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Donald C. Fry". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Donald C. Fry
President and CEO

“Returning Citizen”

For the purpose of this document, the term “returning citizen” is used to describe a man or woman returning to the community after a period of incarceration. The incarceration could be a short time (one week to one year) or an extended period of time (more than one year).



Fact vs. Myth

Understanding the Facts about Hiring Returning Citizens

As is frequently the case, there are many unknowns about hiring a returning citizen. That uncertainty causes some employers to shy away from hiring returning citizens. While it is responsible for an employer to exercise due diligence, often the hesitation is not based in fact but “myth.”

EMPLOYERS ACROSS BALTIMORE CITY AND THE GREATER BALTIMORE REGION — INCLUDING JOHNS HOPKINS HOSPITAL AND OTHERS — HAVE MADE A CONCERTED EFFORT TO HIRE RETURNING CITIZENS AND HAVE FOUND THEM TO BE LOYAL, COMMITTED WORKERS.



Myth Busters

MYTH: Once a criminal, always a criminal.

FACT: Research shows that after a certain period of time, returning citizens pose no greater chance of committing a crime as someone who has never been involved with the criminal justice system.

PastForward, a coalition of organizations working to help people with criminal backgrounds, found that:

“Ex-offenders are often more motivated to work and more grateful for the chance to prove themselves. Some companies find that ex-offenders tend to be committed workers whose success rate is comparable to that of the company’s overall workforce.”

MYTH: People who have been involved with the criminal justice system cannot be loyal, productive employees.

FACT: Employers across Baltimore City - including Johns Hopkins Hospital and others - have made a concerted effort to hire returning citizens and have found them to be loyal, committed workers. This is also true nationally.

An article published last year in Forbes featured Arte Nathan, the former partner to casino mogul Steve Wynn, who spoke of his experiences hiring returning citizens. According to Nathan, “People who have served their time for a crime have an

extensive file on who they are and where they have been. They work harder than other employees, show up to work early, stay later, accept overtime, ask for more work, do more, and truly value their jobs.”

MYTH: My business cannot hire anyone with a criminal background.

FACT: Instituting blanket bans on anyone with a criminal record is likely discriminatory. According to the most recent revisions of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Guidelines on the subject of using arrest and conviction records with regards to employment, employers should not use a policy or practice that excludes people with certain criminal records if the policy or practice significantly disadvantages individuals of a particular race. Instead of refusing to hire anyone with a criminal background, employers should make individualized assessments based upon the severity of the crime committed, the amount of time that has passed since the crime was committed, and the relevance of the committed criminal conduct to the job.



“Second chances are priceless. To give a marginalized person another opportunity to legitimately provide for their family is worth its weight in gold and is moralizing.”

— Gregory Carpenter,
Owner, 2AM Bakery

“Southway Builders has worked with nonprofit partners in the placement of scores of ex-offenders over the last decade. Those individuals who have been placed are exceptional people who just needed a second chance to prove their worth, and show they are anxious learners who just want to participate in the American dream. They have a great work ethic, and are eager to learn and please.”

— Willy Moore, President,
Southway Builders



FAQs

- **What if I hire a returning citizen and they commit another crime?**

The Federal Bonding Program detailed later in this Quick Guide is meant to protect against that scenario by providing employers with fidelity bonds to protect against potential losses with regards to the hiring of vulnerable citizens. However, the chances of a newly-hired returning citizen committing a crime at your workplace are low. According to a study by the Urban Institute, returning citizens who obtain employment within two months after being released from prison are less likely to reoffend and return to prison than those who are unemployed.

- **Are all individuals with a criminal record guilty of committing violent crimes?**

In Maryland the majority of returning citizens are not violent offenders. In fiscal year 2014, offenders convicted of nonviolent crimes made up 58 percent of Maryland's prison population.

- **If an incident comes up on a criminal background check of a prospective employee, does that mean the individual in question was convicted of a crime?**

Not necessarily. Criminal background checks will reveal any involvement a person has had with the judicial system and may include common offenses such as parking tickets or arrests for crimes of which the individual was never convicted.

It is important to ensure that background investigations are done by reputable companies or individuals with an in-depth understanding of how to interpret the different legal codes and terms.

- **How can I help my current employees become comfortable with the idea of working next to a returning citizen?**

In many cases, current employees never know that they are working with a returning citizen. Depending on your company's internal procedures, oftentimes only high-level human resources professionals are aware of a new hire's criminal background.

INDIVIDUALS WITH MEANINGFUL EMPLOYMENT ARE
LESS LIKELY TO RETURN TO CRIME...



Support Programs for Employers

Federal Bonding

The U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) created the Federal Bonding Program (FBP) in 1966 to provide fidelity bonds to employers that hire vulnerable job seekers, such as those who have been involved with the judicial system, welfare recipients, individuals in recovery from a substance abuse addiction, or economically disadvantaged youths and adults who lack work histories.

The bonds issued by the FBP guarantee the job honesty of job seekers to employers that want to hire them. Employers receive the bonds – starting at \$5,000 in value – free-of-charge as an incentive to hire these applicants; coverage is provided for the first six months of a selected individual's term of employment. The Federal Bonding Program was designed to reimburse the employer for any loss due to theft, forgery, larceny, or embezzlement and can be applied to any job, any employee dishonesty committed on or away from the work site, and any full or part-time employee paid wages.

This USDOL program boasts more than 50,000 job placements. Since its inception, bonds have been activated only 1 percent of the time – a 99 percent success rate.

For more information, contact Constance Parker, Maryland Re-entry Coordinator, at 410-767-2018 or constance.parker@maryland.gov.

(Source: U.S. Department of Labor)

Work Opportunity Tax Credit

The Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) is a federal tax credit available to employers that hire and retain veterans and individuals from target groups, including returning citizens, with significant barriers to employment. There is no limit to the number of individuals an employer can hire to qualify to claim the tax credit and there are only a few simple steps to follow to apply for the WOTC.

The amount of tax credit that an employer is eligible to claim depends upon the target group of the individual hired, the wages paid to that individual in the first year of employment, and the number of hours that individual worked. For employers that hire returning citizens, the credit can be claimed as follows:



- If the individual works at least 120 hours, the employer may claim a tax credit equal to 25 percent of the individual's first year wages, up to \$2,400.



- If the individual works at least 400 hours, the employer may claim a tax credit equal to 40 percent of the individual's first year wages, up to \$2,400.

The maximum credit that an employer can claim may exceed these amounts depending on the other circumstances surrounding the employee.

In Maryland, employers can submit and track their WOTC applications online by going to <https://wotc.dllr.state.md.us>. If you have any questions, contact Carl Reavis at 410-767-2093 or Belinda Duncan at 410-767-2047.

(Source: U.S. Department of Labor and Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation)

Northwest Career Center

At the Northwest Career Center in Mondawmin Mall, Baltimore-area businesses can work with the Mayor's Office of Employment Development (MOED) to build and retain a quality workforce. For businesses with hard-to-fill positions, MOED can assist by creating a customized training program and reimbursing businesses up to 50 percent of the training costs. The Northwest Career Center also provides prescreening and assessments of applications, information on financial incentives, and free job postings, outreach, and recruitment.

(Source: Mayor's Office of Employment Development)

"Hirsch Electric has recently exceeded 200 employees. We contribute much of our success in hiring "second chance" individuals. Over the past five years, we have hired at least 10 returning citizens on an annual basis. Employees with criminal backgrounds are dedicated to companies when given an opportunity that most other would not consider."

— Thomas Hirsch,
President, Hirsch Electric, LLC.



Featured Training Programs

Project JumpStart

JumpStart is a 14-week construction-training program for Baltimore residents with a high school diploma or GED where experienced teachers help students learn construction fundamentals. Students also receive essential safety training, financial coaching, a stipend and driver's education. More than 70 percent of students are placed in careers that lead to high wages and apprenticeships. JumpStart classes are designed to model a real job site and provide students with hands-on experience. With a focus on accountability, skills mastery and mathematics, a trainee will leave the program ready for entry-level work on any construction site and with the opportunity to become licensed via apprenticeship.

Vehicles for Change

Through Vehicles for Change's Center for Automotive Careers Training Program, returning citizens are provided a second chance and an opportunity to succeed in the automotive industry. Over the course of the 3-6 month internship program, interns receive Automotive Service Excellence classroom training as well as hands-on training under the supervision of a master mechanic. Graduates have gone on to work as auto technicians and diesel mechanics, while some have pursued careers in sales or service. Since its inception, this program has had a 92 percent graduation rate and has placed 50 people into jobs at an average starting salary of \$16.25. Only 2 graduates have returned to prison — a recidivism rate of 4%.

Second Chance Deconstruction Program

The job training program at Second Chance, Inc. emphasizes skill development and enhancement. Three skills sets that are key to developing and maintaining a strong workforce receive specialized attention – life skills, safety skills and technical on-the-job training skills. Over 16 weeks, trainees receive hands-on instruction in the proper use of numerous types of power tools, hand tools and equipment and participate in four-hour seminars focused on Sustainability Orientation, LEED Orientation, and Second Chance Values. Trainees are also provided the industry-coveted OSHA 10 Certification, along with Lead & Asbestos Recognition and Safe Removal training.

In addition, trainees participate in an EMS (Emergency Medical Services) Course in AED, CPR and first aid. In partnership with Springboard Training, 40 hours of life skill instruction are incorporated into the Workforce Development training program. These seminars are designed to provide instruction on appropriate attitudes and effective behavior in any job situation or market, as well as throughout a person's personal life. Soft skill training areas include: interviewing, self-motivation, effective communication, work ethic, leadership, financial literacy, stress management, conflict resolution, and time management. Upon completing the program, qualified trainees receive additional, specialized training in lead abatement and other hazardous materials removal and handling, as well as forklift operation.

Key Contacts

Greater Baltimore Committee

Shaina Hernandez
Director of Local Government Affairs and Strategic Initiatives
410-727-2820
shainah@cbc.org

United States Attorney's Office, District of Maryland

Elizabeth Morse, Reentry/Prevention Specialist
410-209-4811
elizabeth.morse@usdoj.gov

Mayor's Office of Employment Development, Northwest Career Center

Gerald Grimes, Project Manager
410-396-7873
ggrimes@oedworks.com



GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE

Regional business leaders creating a better tomorrow...today.

111 South Calvert Street - Suite 1700

Baltimore, MD 21202

410.727.2820

410.539.5705 (f)

info@gbc.org



Follow the GBC on Twitter and Facebook