



PLANK 16:

Reimagine reentry to promote dignity and safety for all.

Every year, [more than 600,000](#) people return home from prison, and [approximately 9 million](#) leave local jails. Disproportionately Black, Brown, and low-income, these individuals face extraordinary barriers to success. Not only have they been removed from their families and communities for months or years, but they are often barred from housing, employment and licensure, food, living, education supports, and the democratic process. For example, there are voting rights implications of naturalization bars for lawful permanent residents with criminal records, as well as other voting concerns for youth prosecuted in the adult criminal-legal system.

[When resources are available, they require individuals to navigate the administrative, logistical, and digital complexities of various programs instead of having one holistic source of support.](#) These barriers make it exceedingly difficult for returning individuals to thrive following a period of incarceration.

The United States must provide returning citizens the holistic, community-based services and tools they need to thrive. We must advocate for the elimination of [specific barriers](#) that people reentering society face, including employment discrimination, family separation, lack of education and training, barriers to obtaining occupational licenses, bans on participating in social programs and public housing, inadequate access to medical care, and restrictions on voting. This will enable communities to grow stronger and heal from the devastation of mass incarceration.

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State Policy Priorities

Ensure opportunities to work

- Award state and local contracts to businesses that have fair chance hiring policies and that affirmatively hire individuals with arrest or conviction records, including support for worker cooperatives operated by formerly incarcerated people.
- Remove arrest- and conviction-related occupational licensing barriers and adopt “fair chance” licensing reforms.
- Invest in employment opportunities that benefit formerly incarcerated people, including grants for entrepreneurship; training and workforce development programs; career pathway employment programs, especially in paid pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships; technical assistance and financial incentives for businesses that hire formerly incarcerated people; state-led affirmative hiring programs; subsidized and transitional employment opportunities for formerly incarcerated people, including “earn and learn” opportunities; and worker cooperatives and other “solidarity economy” business models operated by formerly incarcerated people.
- Issue guidance and provide technical assistance to direct existing workforce development programs to target youth and adults impacted by the criminal-legal system with transitional jobs programs, and provide supportive services, including cash assistance, food and nutrition supports, housing, child care, transportation, and health and mental health care.

Ensure access to housing and public benefits

- Remove state law prohibitions that prevent individuals in or returning from prison from receiving public benefits, applying for financial aid, or participating in public programs. These benefits include, but are not limited to, federal financial aid, Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Unemployment Insurance (UI) programs, small business loans, and retraining programs.
- Remove barriers to public or private housing facing individuals with arrest or conviction histories.
- In coordination with reentry and housing providers, provide housing vouchers for individuals released from criminal-legal facilities who lack access to stable, affordable housing.
- Remove restrictions on individuals accessing public housing, employment, occupational licenses, driver’s licenses, and public benefits. [Automatically seal](#) and expunge records immediately upon release for misdemeanors and within several years for certain felonies.

Ensure access to IDs

- Before discharging from adult or juvenile justice facilities, provide individuals with assistance in obtaining a driver's license or state ID card, a Social Security card, a birth certificate, and other records necessary to establish identity and enrollment in health insurance; ensure that a plan for housing exists — but ensure that lack of any plan, service, or other provision noted here never serves to delay release.

Ensure access to the democratic process

- End felony-related voting restrictions, including bans on voting while incarcerated.
- Start counting incarcerated individuals in their home districts rather than in the districts of the prisons where they reside, bringing an end to [prison gerrymandering](#).
- Eliminate all mandatory immigration penalties and consequences, including deportation, bars to asylum, naturalization, citizenship, and voting, etc., for any allegations of criminal conduct, suspected criminal activity, or for arrests, convictions, or other contact with the criminal-legal, juvenile, or family court systems. Make all repeals and changes retroactive.

Ensure access to education

- Create educational programs that have both financial and human capacity to work with formerly incarcerated people for the purposes of secondary and/or post-secondary credentials.
- Provide funding and support to schools to help ensure a smooth return to school for students leaving confinement and reentering communities. These supports should include transition coordinators, timely records transfer, and planning to ensure students are on track for high school graduation and postsecondary education.
- Bar publicly funded colleges and universities, including private universities that receive state funding, from inquiring about criminal-legal histories in the admissions application process.

Ensure access to legal services

- Create a grant program that provides robust investments in legal services for reentering individuals, including for assistance with correcting, sealing, or expunging criminal records.

Federal Policy Priorities

Ensure access to the democratic process

- Restore federal voting rights to currently and formerly incarcerated people.
- Provide individuals in federal prison with information about voting eligibility and registration prior to release.
- Pass legislation that addresses the restoration of voting rights to formerly incarcerated people at the federal level, such as the Democracy Restoration Act.

Ensure access to education

- Promote a “continuum of education” for all reentering individuals.
- Increase funding for the [Second Chance Act](#).
- Encourage states to reform licensing barriers by restricting state access to FBI background checks unless licensing laws meet certain standards.
- Pass legislation like the Beyond the Box for Higher Education Act to advise institutions of higher education on removing questions regarding criminal-legal histories in the application process.
- Support legislation to remove barriers to post-secondary education for individuals with arrest or conviction histories.

Ensure access to housing and public benefits

- Reinstate the Interagency Working Group on Reentry to expand its work to remove federal administrative barriers to accessing employment, education, housing, health care, voting, and other public programs and benefits.
- Increase federal funding for the emergency rental assistance that is distributed through the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Homeless Assistance Grants program, such as is outlined in the Emergency Rental Assistance and Rental Market Stabilization Act. This funding could be used to help formerly incarcerated people cover security and utility deposits and provide short- and medium-term rental assistance for recently released individuals.
- Pass legislation to ban source of income discrimination and expand anti-discrimination protections for individuals involved in the criminal-legal system.
- Establish federal interagency coordination on reentry grant programs for housing, workforce development, education, and health care. Interagency coordination should develop grant opportunities as well as provide training and technical assistance to help reentry programs holistically address the wide range of reentry needs and barriers.

- Remove barriers to federally funded housing for individuals with arrest or conviction histories.
- Support the allocation of resources towards educational, employment, and housing opportunities for incarcerated people and returning citizens.
- In coordination with reentry and housing providers, provide housing vouchers for individuals released from criminal-legal facilities who lack access to stable, affordable housing.
- Support legislation that ensures access to health care for people who are currently and formerly incarcerated, such as the Medicaid Reentry Act.
- Pass legislation that continues funding for the Health Profession Opportunity Grant (HPOG) program, like the Pathways to Careers Act. HPOG bundles education and training with key support services like child care, transportation, and career coaching to provide supportive pathways to a career for a well-paid and in-demand health profession for low-income individuals, including those impacted by the criminal-legal system.
- Increase federal funding for the McKinney-Vento Emergency Solutions Grants (ESGs), such as that proposed in the Public Health Emergency Shelter Act. This funding can be used to ensure that formerly incarcerated people can access non-congregate shelter and housing during the pandemic through short-term rental assistance, rapid rehousing, and housing counseling services.
- Ban prohibitions that prevent individuals in or returning from prison, or individuals with criminal histories, from receiving federal benefits or participating in federal programs. These benefits and programs include, but are not limited to, federal financial aid, Medicaid, SNAP, TANF, SSI, UI, small business loans, and retraining programs.



Invest in workforce training and jobs programs

- Codify and increase funding for the Reentry Employment Opportunities program at the Department of Labor, which provides reentry and workforce development services for career pathway employment.
- Establish and fund a new title within the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) specifically for youth and adults impacted by the criminal-legal system that would increase access to subsidized employment and transitional jobs models, integrated education and training, supportive services, and health and mental health care, with community-informed reporting and accountability requirements.
- Develop and fund a permanent, national, large-scale transitional jobs program that prioritizes youth and adults impacted by the criminal-legal system and other historically oppressed communities. This investment must give immediate access to wages and quality career pathways during the immediate recovery as well as in times when the economy is strong.
- Increase federal funding for the Reentry Employment Opportunities Act, which codifies the Reentry Employment Opportunities program that provides grants to nonprofits to carry out workforce development and reentry services for people who are formerly incarcerated or have criminal records. Ensure that workforce funding provides resources for supportive services, including cash assistance, food and nutrition supports, housing, child care, transportation, and health and mental health care.
- Provide entrepreneurship training grants to formerly incarcerated people and help businesses share best practices in affirmatively hiring formerly incarcerated people through roundtables and other tactics.
- Increase investment to support workforce training for individuals impacted by the criminal-legal system. Fund access to subsidized employment and transitional jobs models, integrated education and training, access to supportive services and community-informed reporting, and accountability requirements for youth and adults impacted by the criminal-legal system.

Remove licensing barriers

- Pass legislation to remove barriers to occupational licenses for individuals with arrest and conviction histories.
- Adopt “fair chance” licensing reforms and remove conviction-related occupational licensing barriers.

Prevent hiring discrimination

- Require all employers to adopt [“fair chance” hiring practices](#) (i.e., “ban the box”); remove questions regarding conviction histories from employment applications; and delay inquiries into arrest and/or conviction histories until after conditional offers have been made. At the same time, increase enforcement of laws surrounding racial discrimination in hiring under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
- Implement the Fair Chance to Compete for Jobs Act of 2019 (P.L. 116-92, Section 1121) by ensuring that the Office of Personnel Management and other federal agencies adopt robust complaint procedures; narrowly apply their discretion to exempt categories of workers; and execute outreach, education, monitoring, and an auditing process, particularly with the nation’s private contractors, to ensure that the protections and the intent of the fair chance law are realized fully.
- Issue regulations to implement the Fair Chance Act.
- Establish a preference for awarding federal contracts to businesses that affirmatively hire individuals with arrest or conviction records, including worker cooperatives operated by formerly incarcerated people.
- Amend the Small Business Act to prohibit the SBA from excluding people from applying for 7(a) loan assistance based on criminal history.
- Increase the amount for which the Department of Labor’s federal bonding program indemnifies employers who hire individuals with criminal records, or who otherwise qualify for bonding from its current level (ranging from \$5,000 to \$25,000 per bond), to \$25,000 for all bonds.

Support reentry programs and holistic safety in communities

- Develop federal grant opportunities within the Second Chance Act program and other reentry programs to provide funding directly to nonprofits, especially those led by or that significantly involve people directly impacted by the criminal-legal system.
- Support full funding and state implementation of the reentry portions of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Programs Act.
- Form a partnership initiative (“Reimagining Public Safety”) between the Departments of Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Labor, and other relevant agencies to make grants that help communities address the social factors increasing jail populations at the local level. Include technical assistance as part of this program, helping ensure that all communities can design effective proposals that apply best practices in needs assessment, program development, and program evaluation.
- Pass and fund legislation that would create community resource centers to assist returning residents as they leave custody as well as individuals who already have returned to the community, such as the One Stop Shop Community Reentry Program Act.

Support policies to seal, expunge, and correct records

- Pass legislation to enable expungement of federal offenses.
- Establish procedures to ensure accuracy of the [FBI's background check systems](#) to ensure that records are accurate.
- Ensure that the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau aggressively enforces the Fair Credit Reporting Act's requirements for employers and background screening companies that work with criminal records.
- Support funding for federal programs that help to identify, remediate, and prevent wrongful convictions and that improve forensic science.
- Ensure that if any criminal history restrictions remain in regulations, the standards in policy documents and application forms for the Paycheck Protection Program and other loans within the general 7(a) program do not exceed what regulations require.

Begin reentry programming in jails and prisons

- Introduce an Incarcerated Person's Bill of Rights, as described in [Plank 7: End inhumane conditions in jails and prisons in the United States](#), which would ensure that people in prison get the education, training, and treatment they need for successful reentry and are able to maintain family relationships.

