

# STAR White Paper 2018

## *Pathways to Employment for Justice Involved Individuals-The Issues*

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Previously incarcerated individuals are facing many obstacles after being released, with employment being one of the major obstacles. Although legislations in some areas have “banned the box” or made it illegal for employers to ask if a potential employee has a criminal record, individuals with criminal backgrounds face many other obstacles including sufficient education, employment history, proper experience and skills. The work place is ever evolving and the worker’s skills and approach to obtaining a job needs to evolve with it.

### **Soft Skills**

In the past, many companies placed great emphasis on the technical or “hard” skills. In many cases, technical expertise was an overriding factor in job advancement, particularly during the Industrial Revolution. Hard skills have been universally defined as the technical expertise and knowledge needed for a job. These skills will differ from job to job, depending on the work. These skills can also be learned through education, training programs, and on-the-job training. Many recent studies indicate that while the so called “hard skills” are imperative for a majority of workplaces, the “soft skill” abilities of applicants are equally valued.<sup>1</sup> Soft skills are interpersonal or people skills that can be used in everyday interactions, such as listening skills, communication skills and empathy.

Companies are continuing to rate their employees’ interpersonal skills as more important than their analytical abilities.<sup>2</sup> In a survey of businesses executed for this paper, employers in the metropolitan Saint Louis area identified and defined the most sought after soft skills necessary for success in the workplace today. These skills include dependability, a positive attitude, an understanding of teamwork, the ability to adapt to changing situations, and a personally developed code of work ethic.

Since soft skills are critical for productive performance in today’s workplace, current and future business leaders are emphasizing the development of soft skills.<sup>3</sup> Today’s contemporary workplaces generally require some level of understanding of both hard and soft skills from potential and existing employees; modern scholars see a strong connection between these levels and productivity as a rubric of performance. This expectation has become particularly critical during periods of downsizing and restructuring- those who lack soft skills may be the first to find

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<sup>1</sup> Tulgan, B. (2015). *Bridging the Soft Skills Gap: How to Teach the Missing Basics to Today’s Young Talent*, Jossey Bass, Inc.

<sup>2</sup> Klaus, P. (2008). “*The Hard Truth About Soft Skills-Workplace Lessons Smart People Wish They’d Learned Sooner*”, Collins, Inc.

<sup>3</sup> Nealy, C. (2005). Integrating soft skills through active learning in the management classroom. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning*. 2(4), 1-6

themselves laid off. While technical skills are a part of many educational curricula, soft skills need further emphasis during job training and development.

For previously incarcerated individuals, increased training which highlights the value and execution of soft skills in an interview has become extremely important. In fact, it may be the singular most important element necessary for a successful interview and hire. Corporate recruiters believe candidates with soft skills have increased value and the ability to make a difference in the workplace. When education and experience may be lacking, these soft skills help to differentiate the applicant and put him or her on a more even playing field with candidates who have never been incarcerated.

### **Ban the Box: Help or Hinder?**

In the United States, there has been a core issue that many believe has contributed to Americans being treated unfairly when they are under consideration for employment. Various studies and research show applications that inquire about an individual's criminal history to be an unfair practice conducted by private and public employers. The 'unfair practice' of inquiring about an individual's criminal history, "raises concerns under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the landmark federal legislation that prohibits employment discrimination on the basis of, . . . race and color."<sup>4</sup> When employers, both private and public, inquire about criminal history, in some instances they are violating Title VII's discrimination clauses.<sup>5</sup> It is believed that by using the information of an applicant's criminal history, the applicant will not receive the same chance at obtaining employment that an applicant who does not have a criminal history would receive. Is Ban the Box helping or discouraging an applicant from applying to jobs?

The Ban the Box initiative was first introduced in 2004 by the "All of Us or None" grassroots civil rights movement.<sup>6</sup> This human rights organization focuses on fighting for the rights of individuals who are currently or formerly incarcerated. In the past, there were two main purposes for the initiative:

1. To force 'employers to evaluate the skills of the applicant before having the opportunity to make a stereotypical judgment about ex-offenders,'
2. To minimize 'the deterrent effect that questions about criminal history on an application can have on applicants with criminal records.'<sup>7</sup>

The legislation and policy of Ban the Box varies from city to city, but the underlying purposes are generally the same: to assist the applicant in having a fair shot with obtaining employment. Ban-the-Box policies were created to level the playing field and reduce biases faced by people with criminal records in the labor market. Ban-the-Box policies restrict an employer from asking questions about criminal history on job applications and force them to

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<sup>4</sup> Chinnadurai, J. Banning the Box in Missouri: A Statewide Step in the Right Direction. *Missouri Law Review*, Volume 82, Issue 3.

<sup>5</sup> See note 4

<sup>6</sup> See note 4

<sup>7</sup> See note 4

delay background checks until later in the hiring process. Some Ban the Box laws allow the employer to ask about criminal history any time after the first interview, while others do not allow it until after a conditional job offer is made.<sup>8</sup> Various other Ban-the-Box laws apply to both public and private employers, while in other areas they only apply to public employers, such as city or state level jobs.<sup>9</sup>

### **Other Discriminating Factors**

There are critics who believe those employers that chose to ‘ban the box’ may not have considered the unintended consequences.<sup>10</sup> Since the implementation of Ban the Box across the country, some recent studies show that employers are deciding to use other discriminating factors to determine how they will assess an applicant’s application.<sup>11</sup> In recent studies, employers were found to be at risk for inadvertently discriminating against racially protected candidates, such as African Americans.<sup>12</sup> A study conducted in June 2015 by researchers at the University of Michigan and Princeton University found that Ban the Box policies may be “effectively removing the disadvantage of having a criminal record... but may be causing unintended consequences”.<sup>13</sup> In the study, almost 15,000 fake online job applications were submitted before and after Ban the Box legislation went into effect.<sup>14</sup> The study then looked at whether employer callbacks for interviews varied due to the applicant’s race and prior criminal history status, particularly based on whether the availability of the latter information changed the racial gap in callback rates.<sup>15</sup> The results showed that overall, White applicants received about 23% more callbacks compared to similar Black applicants; the study also showed that applicants without a felony conviction were 62% more likely to be called back than those with a conviction.<sup>16</sup> In a similar study conducted in July 2016 by the University of Virginia and the University of Oregon, researchers considered the factor of education amongst Black and Hispanic men between the ages of 25-34 who were labeled ‘low-skilled’ because they did not have a college degree.<sup>17</sup> Another study conducted by Daniel Shoag of Harvard Kennedy School found that employers raised requirements for education and experience after implementation of Ban the Box measures. Applicants without criminal histories that are viewed as ‘low-skilled’ and have no higher levels of education are primary targets for employment discrimination practices as well.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Avery, B. and Hernandez, P., (2018). *Ban the Box U.S. Cities, Counties, and States Adopt Fair-Chance Policies to Advance Employment Opportunities for People with Past Convictions*. National Employment Law Project <http://www.nelp.org/content/uploads/Ban-the-Box-Fair-Chance-State-and-Local-Guide.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Stacy, C., and Cohen, M., *Ban the Box and Racial Discrimination: A Review of the Evidence and Policy Recommendations*. Feb 2017 [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/88366/ban\\_the\\_box\\_and\\_racial\\_discrimination.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/88366/ban_the_box_and_racial_discrimination.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> See note 9

<sup>11</sup> Anders, Scott, *Challenges with Ban the Box*, Missouri Policy Journal. Number 5 (Summer/Fall 2017)

<sup>12</sup> See note 11

<sup>13</sup> See note 6, 7, 11

<sup>14</sup> See note 6, 7, 11

<sup>15</sup> See note 6, 7, 11

<sup>16</sup> See note 6, 7, 11

<sup>17</sup> See note 4

<sup>18</sup> See note 6, 7, 11

## **Success or Failure?**

Since its introduction in 2004, there are now 25 states and over 150 communities practicing the laws or policies of Ban the Box.<sup>19</sup> In November 2015, President Barack Obama signed an executive order to Ban the Box for executive branch jobs in the federal government. There may never be a way to not discriminate against those who have criminal histories, that are considered low-skilled, or who have limited education, but Ban the Box is a way to encourage those who are effectively seeking employment that there have been measures put in place to help.<sup>20</sup> In terms of analyzing Ban the Box's effectiveness, it is important to remember the legislation's purposes: to help people with criminal records gain employment and to achieve racial equality in the workplace.<sup>21</sup>

### **Additional Barriers and Incentives for Employers**

While getting a job can be challenging for anyone, it is even more so for those with the stigma of having a felony conviction- regardless of what the conviction may be. Many employers are hesitant to even consider interviewing someone with a prior conviction. Additionally, the lack of educational achievements faced by many inmates significantly limits the type of jobs they may be eligible for upon release, as well as the connection between low paying jobs and lower education levels. "In 1997, roughly 38 percent of State and Federal inmates did not have a high school or general equivalency diploma, a rate more than twice that found in the general population."<sup>22</sup> Combine that with poor employment history, if any history at all, and a lack of 'soft skills' such as interview etiquette, resume writing and similar skills that are often not taught to those who are or have formally been incarcerated, and the barriers to employment appear nearly impossible to overcome.<sup>23</sup>

Many times, there are specific barriers to employment faced by those returning to the community after incarceration that are not directly related to soft skills or lack of training and education. One of these barriers is simply convincing employers it is worthwhile for them to hire someone convicted of a crime. There are some incentive programs that are seeking to aid in encouraging employers to hire a formerly incarcerated individual. One such program is the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, a Federal tax credit program available to employers who hire formerly incarcerated individuals as well as other specific target groups who face significant barriers to employment.<sup>24</sup> The WOTC helps targeted workers move from economic dependency into self-sufficiency as they earn a steady income and become contributing taxpayers, while participating employers can reduce their income tax liability.<sup>25</sup> For an employer to apply to receive the WOTC for hiring an ex-offender, the new employee must have been convicted of a felony and have been hired not more than one year after conviction or release from prison. However, this requires a lot of work on the employer's part, and often times the tax credit is not

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<sup>19</sup> See note 7

<sup>20</sup> See note 4, 7

<sup>21</sup> See note 4

<sup>22</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics. The De-Licensing of Occupations in the United States. Washington, D.C.: May 2015, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2015/article/the-de-licensing-of-occupations-in-the-united-states-1.htm>.

<sup>23</sup> See note 17

<sup>24</sup> United States Department of Labor. Work opportunity tax credit. <https://www.doleta.gov/business/incentives/opptax/>

<sup>25</sup> See note 19

viewed as “worth it” when weighed against perceived risks of hiring someone who has been convicted of a crime.<sup>26</sup> In order to earn the WOTC, an employer must ensure the employee works at least 120 hours in the first year of employment, about 3 hours a week, and the employer can earn a credit equal to 25% of the employee’s wage. If the employee works at least 400 hours in their first year, or about 8 hours per week, the credit earned is equal to 40% of the employees’ wages. For employers who pay \$10.00 per hour, the credit earned for hiring an ex-offender who works 120 hours across a year is only \$300; for 400 hours, it is slightly more appealing at \$1,600.<sup>27</sup> Last year in Missouri, 6,132 applications were received under the designation of ex-felon.<sup>28</sup>

Licensing is another form of occupational regulation that may present barriers for formerly incarcerated men and women.<sup>29</sup> For example, someone who previously was working as a nurse or CNA before a criminal conviction may not be eligible to continue in that career field after their release, regardless if the offense was related to their job. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, occupational licensing has increased dramatically over the years, leading to a larger share of American workers who need a license to perform their work.<sup>30</sup> The number of Americans who hold an occupational license has grown five-fold over the last several decades, from five percent of the employed population in the 1950s to almost 25% of all employed workers today.<sup>31</sup> Prompted by concerns for public safety, career development, consumer protection and other policy goals, the growth in state licensing over time has created a patchwork of different requirements across states which can limit worker mobility. Occupational licensure can also reduce wages for unlicensed workers relative to their licensed counterparts, reduce geographic mobility, and disproportionately burden low-income people and those with a criminal history.

According to the Council of State Governments Justice Center, there are 582 legal barriers to employment in Missouri, including 56 occupational licenses and 46 licenses laws.<sup>32</sup> This means anyone convicted of a crime is unable to work in certain fields, or unable to obtain appropriate licensing or certifications within a field of work, even if the person’s criminal charges are potentially unrelated to their field or licensing.<sup>33</sup> There are specific professional licenses that someone with certain felony convictions are prohibited from obtaining or that add additional barriers to employment due to the convictions.<sup>34</sup> For example in Missouri, if someone is convicted of a “dangerous felony”, murder in the first degree, certain sexual offenses, certain offenses involving children, child pornography, or mortgage fraud, they are ineligible to obtain licenses as a real estate salesperson or real estate broker.<sup>35, 36</sup> Should someone wish to become a licensed social worker in Missouri after their release from prison, they must not have a felony conviction in the 10 years immediately prior to their application for their license.<sup>37</sup> For most professions that require a professional license, the boards have discretion whether to issue a

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<sup>26</sup> See note 19

<sup>27</sup> See note 19

<sup>28</sup> See note 19

<sup>29</sup> National Conference of State Legislatures. The State of Occupational Licensing: Research, State Policies and Trends. [http://www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/HTML\\_LargeReports/occupationallicensing\\_final.htm](http://www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/HTML_LargeReports/occupationallicensing_final.htm)

<sup>30</sup> See note 24

<sup>31</sup> See note 24

<sup>32</sup> <https://niccc.csgjusticecenter.org/search/?jurisdiction=28>

<sup>33</sup> See note 24

<sup>34</sup> See note 24

<sup>35</sup> See note 24, 27

<sup>36</sup> Missouri Division of Professional Registration. <https://pr.mo.gov/Default.asp>

<sup>37</sup> See note 31

license or not when statutes define limitations for applicants with a criminal background. Generally, the criminal history must be “related to the qualifications, functions, or duties of the profession or for any offense having an essential element of which is fraud, dishonesty, or an act of violence” and some of the statutes allow denial for “any offense involving moral turpitude.”<sup>38</sup>

### Employment and Sex Offenders

Employment is an important part of the reentry process as it is associated with increasing one’s social support and decreasing recidivism. Individuals convicted of sexual offenses are often found to have stable employment histories and overall lower likelihoods of recidivism for all types of offending, although unemployment is associated with increased sexual recidivism.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Additionally, individuals with sexual offenses are often not granted the same employment opportunities as others with convictions because of the stigma surrounding their offense. These individuals often have additional community supervision conditions, electronic monitoring requirements, and mandated treatment, all with the potential to interfere with employment.<sup>41</sup> For example, individuals with sexual offenses often experience a decrease in employment opportunities and pay, earning half their annual income following a sex offense conviction.<sup>42</sup>

Moreover, the passing of sex offender registries, initiated by the Jacob Wetterling Act in 1994, require individuals with sexual offenses to register in each state for public safety by providing current information on themselves. Subsequently, Megan’s Law in 1996 made this information public and today, individual and residency information is common almost everywhere.<sup>43</sup> Online public registries for sex offenses have made it particularly challenging for employment.<sup>44 45</sup>

Individuals convicted of sex offenses encounter other related burdens to finding and maintaining employment. Studies indicate residency restrictions limit employment opportunities and create financial difficulties. Levenson and Hern (2007) found that 37% of the individuals in their study with sexual offenses lived far away from potential employment opportunities due to residency restrictions.<sup>46</sup> Tewksbury and Zgoba found that individuals with sexual offenses reported high levels of stress due to job search with 42% of these individuals reporting

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<sup>38</sup> See note 31

<sup>39</sup> Hanson, R. K., & Morton-Bourgon, K. E. (2005). The characteristics of persistent sexual offenders: a meta-analysis of recidivism studies. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 73*(6), 1154.

<sup>40</sup> Willis, G. M., & Grace, R. C. (2009). Assessment of community reintegration planning for sex offenders: Poor planning predicts recidivism. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 36*(5), 494- 512.

<sup>41</sup> Daly, K. (2008). Setting the record straight and a call for radical change: A reply to Annie Cossins on ‘restorative justice and child sex offences’. *British Journal of Criminology, 48*(4), 557-566.

<sup>42</sup> Bense, T., & Sample, L. L. (2016). The influence of sex offender registration and notification laws on fostering collective identity among offenders. *Journal of Crime and Justice, 1- 15*

<sup>43</sup> Tewksbury, R. (2005). Collateral consequences of sex offender registration. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice, 21*(1), 67-81

<sup>44</sup> See note 38

<sup>45</sup> Tewksbury, R., & Lees, M. (2006). Perceptions of sex offender registration: Collateral consequences and community experiences. *Sociological Spectrum, 26*(3), 309-334.

<sup>46</sup> Levenson, J.S., & Hern, A.L. (2007). Sex offender residence restrictions: Unintended consequences and community reentry. *Justice Policy and Research, 9*(1), 59-73.

employment difficulties.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, many individuals with sexual offenses are more likely to be employed in factory or manual labor industries.<sup>48</sup>

In addition, employers also hinder job opportunities for those with sexual offenses. Employers can prohibit individuals from jobs where they interact with potential victims in positions for retail and security, at hotels, or in medicine.<sup>49</sup> Brown, Spencer, and Deakin found that of the employers they surveyed, half stated that they would not hire an individual with a sexual offense.<sup>50</sup> Their reasoning included the potential risk to their staff and customers, and fear of negative views by the public.<sup>51</sup>

### **Employment Training/Reentry in Missouri DOC**

When offenders enter the Missouri Department of Corrections, their education levels are assessed. Offenders without a high school diploma are required to work towards attaining their high school equivalence (HSE). The Department of Corrections views basic adult education as an integral part of the reentry process and studies show positive impacts in reducing recidivism. Missouri statute requires offenders without a high school diploma or equivalent to participate in adult education classes while incarcerated. The department also provides literacy classes and instructional services for educationally disadvantaged or disabled offenders under the age of 21. In addition to working with offenders to obtain their HSE, Missouri Department of Corrections also offers a 10-week Employability Skills/Life Skills (ES/LS) class. ES/LS is a workforce readiness class for offenders who have a release date within three years of the start of class, covering topics such as effective communication, diversity, personal development and goal setting.

There are also several vocational training programs offered throughout the Missouri Department of Corrections, such as automotive repair, business technology, electrical wiring, residential carpentry, plumbing, small engines, welding, diesel mechanics and industrial technology, culinary arts, cosmetology, and the certified nursing assistant program. Missouri Vocational Enterprises (MVE) is a program of the Division of Offender Rehabilitative Services within the Missouri Department of Corrections, established by State Statute (RSMo 217.550), to create meaningful job training for incarcerated offenders.<sup>52</sup> MVE utilizes offender labor, along with supervisors and administrative staff, to provide quality products and services to state agencies and other not-for-profit entities.<sup>53</sup> The objective of Missouri Vocational Enterprises is to develop personal responsibility in offenders through the development of diverse training programs that enhance their employability and opportunity for success while incarcerated and

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<sup>47</sup> Tewksbury, R., & Zgoba, K. M. (2010). Perceptions and coping with punishment: How registered sex offenders respond to stress, internet restrictions, and the collateral consequences of registration. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 54(4), 537-551

<sup>48</sup> Brown, K., Spencer, J., & Deakin, J. (2007). The reintegration of sex offenders: Barriers and opportunities for employment. *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 46(1), 32-42.

<sup>49</sup> Center for Sex Offender Management (CSOM) (2007). <http://csom.org/>

<sup>50</sup> See note 42

<sup>51</sup> See note 42

<sup>52</sup> Missouri Vocational Enterprises <https://doc.mo.gov/mve/html/about.html>

<sup>53</sup> See note 47



upon release.<sup>54</sup> MVE is responsible for 22 different industries and services located in 12 correctional institutions throughout the state.<sup>55</sup> Some of the industries include metal work, textiles, school products, and building furniture. Through the partnership between DOC and the US Department of Labor Apprenticeship Program, there are about 50 positions within Missouri Vocational Enterprises (MVE) that qualify for the US Department of Labor's Apprenticeship Program; MVE currently has 366 offenders pursuing an apprenticeship.<sup>56</sup> At the end of 2016, there were 32,461 offenders incarcerated in Missouri.

While there are programs offered to men and women while they are incarcerated, these are often limited to certain correctional institutions. For example, in 2015, the Division of Reentry Services (DORS) was able to purchase a commercial truck driving simulator, similar to those currently being used in the trucking industry to train new drivers and began offering a Commercial Vehicle Operator training class at Northeast Correctional Center (NECC) in Bowling Green, MO.<sup>57</sup> Then, in 2016, the Missouri Highway Patrol proctored the first CDL written exam for incarcerated students also at NECC.<sup>58</sup> Once released, those offenders have 12 months to complete the driving portion of their exam.<sup>59</sup> Another pilot program that began in 2015, made possible through a partnership with DOC and the Department of Economic Development- Division of Workforce Development, State Technical College of Missouri, the Cole County Certified Work Ready Community Committee and the Central Region Workforce Investment Board, allowed for offenders at Algoa Correctional Center (ACC) to test for the National Career Readiness Certificate prior to their release with a nearly 93% passing rate overall.<sup>60</sup> In 2016, the program was expanded to the Women's Eastern Reception, Diagnostic and Correctional Center (WERDCC) in Vandalia, and the Boonville Correctional Center. Those who test while incarcerated are also entered in the Missouri Job Center database to assist connection to employers after release.<sup>61</sup>

Other programs offered include Puppies for Parole, which works through the Department of Corrections partnership between animal shelters and animal advocate groups statewide.<sup>62</sup> Offenders have the opportunity to become trainers to rescue dogs, teaching them basic obedience skills and properly socializing the animals, making them more adoptable.<sup>63</sup> The CHAMP Assistance Dogs and Missouri Department of Corrections are partnered on two programs at the Women's Eastern Reception, Diagnostic and Correctional Center (WERDCC).<sup>64</sup> The offender-trainers learn positive interaction skills, gain job-related skills, and gain social skills

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<sup>54</sup> See note 47

<sup>55</sup> See note 47

<sup>56</sup> See note 47

<sup>57</sup> Missouri Department of Rehabilitative Services <https://doc.mo.gov/DORS/>

<sup>58</sup> See note 52

<sup>59</sup> See note 52

<sup>60</sup> See note 52

<sup>61</sup> See note 52

<sup>62</sup> Puppies for Parole <https://doc.mo.gov/DAI/P4P.php>

<sup>63</sup> See note 57

<sup>64</sup> CHAMPS Dogs <http://www.champdogs.org/assistance-dog-program/prison>

Zehr, M. A. (1998, February 18). *New office economy putting greater demands on schools*. *Education Week*, 17(23), 7.

experience.<sup>65</sup> The female offenders help raise and train the dogs on basic skills through advanced service dog skills. The CHAMP to the Rescue Program is the rescue dog program which provides 10-12 weeks of training in basic skills and house manners in dogs that come from the local shelters. It is not uncommon for housing units in the institutions to adopt dogs after they complete their training while awaiting adoption in the community.<sup>66</sup>

### **Employment Resources and the Reality for Formally Incarcerated Men and Women**

“Man, I just want a job. I don’t even care what it is. I just wanna work.” This is what so many men and women who are currently incarcerated or previously incarcerated often say. For them, a job means they are successful. Statistically speaking, this is accurate. Those who are employed full-time after they are released from prison are less likely to return to prison compared to those who are not employed. The most recent statistics available from Missouri Department of Corrections shows that the “recidivism rate is 43.9% for all releases and 36.9% for first time releases for offenders released in 2014 (as calculated on June 30, 2016)”<sup>67</sup> In 2014, “46% of all persons under community supervision, were unemployed during a three-month reporting period.”<sup>68</sup> As of December 31, 2016, the Missouri Reentry Process (MRP) identified that 69% of offenders who have never had full time employment return to prison within two years, compared to 23% of offenders who have had full time employment returning within two years. 43% of offenders who leave prison without a high school diploma or equivalent return to prison within two years, compared to 31% of offenders who obtain a High School Equivalency while incarcerated returning within two years.<sup>69</sup>

In a personal interview with a 24 year old incarcerated male, “No one wants to make minimum wage and struggle all the time when you can make fast, easy money in the streets; the streets don’t care if you got your GED or not!” Although he is currently working on his high school equivalence, he does have future employment goals. “Get my real estate license, buy some properties, fix them up, and sell them for a profit- that’s easy money too,” he says. When asked if he has any experience doing any sort of home repair or with real estate, he shrugged. “Not for real, but I know people who do, so I figure they can show me or I can just pay them to do stuff,” he shared.

Here in Missouri, there are resources available to those transitioning or soon to transition from prison. In St. Louis, there are multiple non-profit and faith-based organizations that provide both pre-release and post-release services. Although space in these programs are often limited due to lack of funding, available beds, and other resources, the need for true wrap around services continues. Tasks such as obtaining identifications, working towards a GED, searching

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<sup>65</sup> See note 59

<sup>66</sup> See note 59

<sup>67</sup> Missouri Department of Corrections. (2017). *Missouri Reentry Process Report to the Governor 2016*. Retrieved from <https://doc.mo.gov/Documents/mrp/GovReport.pdf>

<sup>68</sup> Institute for Advancing Justice Research and innovation. (2015). *Impact of Incarceration – Key Points National and Missouri Statistics*. Washington University St. Louis.

<sup>69</sup> Office of Reentry Services. (2017). *Missouri reentry process brochure*. Retrieved from Missouri Department of Corrections- Office of Reentry Services website: <http://www.doc.mo.gov>

for employment, substance use programming, and addressing mental and physical health concerns often leave individuals overwhelmed and discouraged opening the door to previous patterns of behavior that lead to recidivism.

### **CONCLUSION**

The reality for those being released from prison is that it is hard to know which employers are truly 'felon friendly'. The fear of being turned down due to past convictions is very real among the men and women who are formally incarcerated. Without access to training, educational programs, and wrap around services, many re-enter society with minimal knowledge of what to do once they are released. Employing formerly incarcerated individuals not only progresses economic development within the community, but it also reduces recidivism as these individuals are able to become productive members of society.