



Position Statement on the Importance of Removing Barriers to Employment for Individuals with a Criminal Background

Individuals with a criminal record or who were formerly incarcerated face many barriers to reentering society. Despite being held accountable for their actions, oftentimes barriers to employment, housing, bank accounts, drivers' licenses, and more make it difficult for these individuals to find their footing, leading to years of being in and out of the criminal justice system. Individuals who can rehabilitate and reenter society successfully have lower recidivism rates, which improves public safety, saves taxpayer dollars, and contributes to economic success for everyone in our community.

Across Lancaster County and the United States, businesses are struggling to hire skilled workers – people trained for jobs in industries like healthcare, technology, and manufacturing and for jobs in the trades like plumbers and electricians. In a 2022 survey of Lancaster County employers, 65% indicated workforce availability and development was the most important local/regional priority to their business[1]. With a tight labor market and low unemployment rate, it is imperative that we do not exclude eligible, qualified candidates from our talent pools.

Many individuals in the criminal justice system receive education or vocational training during incarceration and/or work with a job placement organization. As a result, upon reentry, they offer valuable skills and talent to a variety of industry sectors, while rebuilding a solid foundation for themselves. However, individuals with a criminal background are unemployed at a rate of 29% in Pennsylvania (as of June 2023), compared to 3.8% for the state population at-large[2].

The Lancaster Chamber seeks to remove barriers to employment for qualified workers, including individuals with a criminal record, so that we can meet our county's workforce demands and reduce recidivism in our community. Specifically, we support federal and state legislation that address the following issues:

- Standardizing expungement opportunities for individuals who have been conviction-free and contributing members of society for several years;
- Probation reform that reduces recidivism for minor technical violations;
- Juvenile justice reform that diverts young people to community-based interventions and seals records automatically once certain rehabilitative thresholds have been met.

Businesses will benefit from having a diverse, qualified talent pool to recruit employees from, and these strategies will ensure individuals with a criminal background are not automatically rejected. Fair hiring practices allow individuals to compete for employment, without adding mandates to employers to support the county's workforce needs. When everyone in our community can find gainful employment, they are filling workforce gaps, contributing to our local economy, and adequately supporting themselves and their families.

Approved by the Advocacy Committee on 08.11.2023

Approved by the Board of Trustees on 08.15.2023

Supported by the Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13 (IU13)

[1] Lancaster Chamber 2022 Business Outlook and Engagement Survey Results

[2] <https://www.parole.pa.gov/Information/Monthly%20Statistical%20Reports/Pages/default.aspx>