

# EMPLOYMENT BARRIERS FACING EX-OFFENDERS OF COLOR

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# INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE

- The unemployment rate for ex-offenders is 27%
- Black ex-offenders: 35% unemployment for men and 43% for women
- Higher unemployment rates than the Great Depression

# INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE

- Recidivism- the tendency to reoffend
- Employment is crucial in fighting recidivism
- Background checks exclude many ex-offenders from the workplace

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- Racial discrimination is illegal
- Discrimination against those with a criminal record is not
- Racial discrimination can exist within the bounds of ex-offender filtration

# HISTORIC EXCLUSION OF EX-OFFENDERS

- Incarceration was originally intended for violent crimes
- Reagan's War on Drugs
- 15% of U.S. Black men have been incarcerated
- 33% of U.S. Black men have a felony criminal record

## EX-OFFENDER STATUS AND RACE

- Access to criminal records is easy and, in some cases, mandatory
- Background checking companies will release records to employers for a fee
- Devah Pager study in Milwaukee

## EX-OFFENDER STATUS AND RACE

### WHITE CALLBACK RATES

- Without a criminal record: 34%
- With criminal records: 17%

### BLACK CALLBACK RATES

- Without a criminal record: 14%
- With a criminal record: 5%

# RACIAL STEREOTYPES IMPACTING UNEMPLOYMENT

- Liability and negligent hiring
- Media-enforced stereotypes of African Americans as crime-prone and violent
- Stereotypes and liability make it difficult for ex-offenders of color to find work



# REENTRY BARRIERS

- Barriers in education, housing, and job training
- Many ex-offenders of color have a high school level of education or lower
- 35% of state prisons report offering college courses to inmates

# HOUSING DISCRIMINATION

- Many urban environments that ex-offenders of color return to cannot support them
- Housing discrimination means limited housing options
- Permanent address necessary for job applications

## CURRENT EFFORTS AT CHANGE

- Reentry programs aimed at ex-offenders of color
- Education and training inside of prisons
- Cost-effective compared to reincarceration

## CURRENT EFFORTS AT CHANGE

- Ban the Box Movement
  - Withhold questions about criminal record until later in the hiring process
  - Implemented in 35 states
- Fair Chance to Compete for Jobs Act of 2019
  - Job offer before criminal record questioning

# POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

- Modifying the Health Law framework
- Relevance is most important
- Must directly correlate to poor job performance

## POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

- Regulate criminal records and rap sheets
- Errors with background checking companies
- “User-friendly” criminal records
- More information included within the criminal record

# POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

- Programs within prisons and reentry programs need to be expanded
- Developing hard and soft skills
- The Safer Foundation

# POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

- Tax breaks or insurance for companies
- Negligent hiring insurance
- Modify the Work Opportunity Tax Credit
  - Extension necessary
  - Include those hired anytime after conviction/release



# CONCLUSION

- Value qualifications and skills over a criminal history
- Job training, education, and reentry assistance
- Stability and reentry can lessen the stigma surrounding ex-offenders