

FEDERAL INTERAGENCY REENTRY COUNCIL: REENTRY WEEK FACT SHEET

WASHINGTON – Each year, more than 600,000 individuals are released from state and federal prisons, and 11.4 million cycle through local jails. In addition, a broader population—some one in three Americans of working age—has an arrest record, mostly for relatively minor, non-violent offenses, sometimes from decades in the past. The long-term, sometimes lifetime, impact of a criminal record will keep many people from obtaining employment, accessing housing, higher education, loans and credit—even if they have paid their debt to society, turned their lives around, are qualified and are unlikely to reoffend. At the same time, research shows that people who stay out of trouble for just a few years are largely indistinguishable from the general population in terms of their odds of being arrested again in the future. Further, pro-social activities such as employment, education and civic engagement—the very things that people with criminal records are often barred from participating in—reduce recidivism.

At the Second Chance Conference on Dec. 16, 2015, Attorney General Loretta E. Lynch said, “At this critical juncture – this moment of rare bipartisan agreement – it is more important than ever that we harness this momentum and continue to push forward, so that every American returning from prison can find dignified work and adequate shelter; so that they can receive fair treatment and full opportunity; so that they return to a society that values them as fellow citizens; so that they can, in fact, truly return home.”

To address these large-scale issues, the Federal Interagency Reentry Council has been working together for five years to reduce recidivism and improve employment, education, housing, health and child welfare outcomes. Comprised of more than 20 federal agencies, the Reentry Council coordinates and leverages existing federal resources that are targeted to reentry; uses the bully pulpit to dispel myths, clarify policies and provide visibility to programs and policies that work; and reduces the policy barriers to successful reentry. The council was recognized in a 2014 [GAO report](#) as one of four model interagency collaborations, and the council’s collective work at the federal level has set a positive example for many states, several of which have started similar councils.

In its first five years, the Reentry Council has:

- **Enacted policy changes that reduce post-prison barriers to employment, education, healthcare and housing.** The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission issued [guidance](#) regarding the appropriate use of arrest and conviction records in employment decisions. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) issued similar [fair housing guidance](#) that explains when barriers to housing for those with a criminal record violate the anti-discrimination provisions of the Fair Housing Act. The Small Business Administration expanded its [Microloan eligibility](#) rules, and the Department of Justice [directed](#) all of its components to take collateral consequences into account when proposing any new regulation or guidance. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) will soon propose a “[Ban the Box](#)” rule change to delay inquiries into criminal history for federal employment until later in the hiring process.

- **Built on groundbreaking research**, such as a federally-funded correctional education study, by expanding [correctional education](#) resources and reentry programs that have been found to reduce recidivism, boost employment and save taxpayer dollars. As part of this effort, the Departments of Education (ED), in collaboration with the Department of Justice, launched the [Second Chance Pell pilot](#), providing a limited waiver of the statutory ban on Pell for incarcerated students in federal or state prisons in order to help pay for postsecondary education and training programs. ED and the Department of Justice also released [joint guidance](#) on correctional education and co-invested in adult and juvenile reentry in an effort to bridge the gap between institution and community-based education and support services.
- **Developed new systems**, such as the [Veterans Reentry Search Service](#) (VRSS), that quickly and systematically identifies incarcerated individuals with a record of military service so that reentry planning and connection to the Department of Veterans Affairs' services can begin early. VRSS is now active in 218 jurisdictions in 28 states.
- **Increased access to healthcare coverage and treatment** for justice-involved populations who disproportionately experience mental health and substance abuse health problems. The game-changing opportunity—created by the [Affordable Care Act](#)—is poised to increase public safety, improve public health and ultimately save taxpayer dollars.
- **Started to address the widespread issues resulting from a minor or erroneous criminal record.** HUD and the Department of Justice are awarding first-time [Justice Reentry Assistance Program](#) (JRAP) grants to aid eligible youth in public housing to expunge or seal their records so that they can access employment and education opportunities. The Department of Labor (DOL) and the Department of Justice will soon launch a [National Clean Slate Clearinghouse](#) to provide technical assistance to help with record-cleaning and expungement. And the Federal Trade Commission continues to provide education to businesses and job seekers on the use of [background checks](#) in employment and other decisions.
- **Raised public awareness**, through fact sheets, like the [Reentry Myth Busters](#), and events, such as the White House [Champions of Change](#) convenings, that shine a light on key issues including improving outcomes for children of incarcerated parents, reentry and employment. The White House [Fair Chance Business Pledge](#) is engaging employers, large and small, that are making substantial commitments to provide individuals with criminal records a fair chance to participate in the American economy.
- **Created direct and centralized access to critical information that is often hard to find**—about [Social Security benefits](#) and [child support modification](#), for example—via dedicated reentry webpages on existing federal websites. The council also created (in collaboration with the National Reentry Resource Center) an [interactive map](#) that identifies the federal reentry grants in every state and a one-stop [webpage](#) of funding opportunities.

- **Established new positions to support and institutionalize reentry efforts.** The Department of Justice designated Prevention and Reentry Coordinator positions in each U.S. Attorney’s Office “to ensure that this work is, and will remain, a top priority throughout the country.” The Bureau of Prisons created a new [Reentry Services Division](#), and an assistant director position to lead that division.
- **Led by example.** The Department of Justice also brought on board its inaugural [Second Chance Fellow](#), Daryl Atkinson. Recognizing that many of those directly impacted by the criminal justice system hold significant insight into reforming the justice system, this position was designed to bring in a person who is both a leader in the criminal justice field and a formerly incarcerated individual. Mr. Atkinson works as a colleague to the Reentry Council, an advisor to the Bureau of Justice Assistance Second Chance programs and serves as a conduit to the broader justice-involved population to ensure that the council is hearing from all stakeholders.

Taken together, these are significant milestones in the council’s work to provide a second chance for those who have served their time and paid their debts—to compete for a job, attain stable housing, support their families and contribute to their communities.

For more on the Reentry Council, visit <https://csgjusticecenter.org/nrrc/projects/firc/>.