



**State of Connecticut**  
**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
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**VICE CHAIR**  
Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee

**MEMBER**  
Education Committee  
Human Services Committee

February 16, 2017

Good Afternoon Representative Porter, Senator Gomes, Senator Miner and the distinguished members of the Labor Committee. I am here today to testify in support of HB 6219 AAC COMMUNITY REENTRY BY PERSONS WHO WERE INCARCERATED.

Most of us believe in second chances. My dad (Brandon, Sr.) definitely needed them! He was my hero. He died several years back. He taught me the true meaning of a second chance.

In theory, when someone convicted of a crime has completed their sentence, they get a second chance to become a productive, successful member of their community. In reality, those who are formerly-incarcerated face a host of barriers in readjusting to society and obtaining housing and employment. And if they fail, they too often revert to a lifestyle that leads back to prison. The Osborn Correctional Institute is home to a program called Skills of Socialization, S.O.S. for short, that teaches inmates how to overcome the obstacles they will confront after their release. The peer-led program was created in 2015 by a group of inmates serving time for crimes that ranged from robbery to murder. The seven founders, whose collective time served approached a staggering 150 years, wanted to help other men avoid their mistakes.

The S.O.S curriculum helps inmates gain an awareness of how their own attitudes and self-perception influence life outcomes. The eight-week point program brings in guest speakers to discuss the importance of life skills, like cooperation and team building, which will help them outside of prison. Together, my experiences at Connecticut Business Industry Association (CBIA) discussion and the Osborn Correctional Institute both highlight the multidimensional approach needed to support formerly-incarcerated. With the support of the correctional system, the S.O.S. program guides inmates to think critically about their choices and develop life skills. This is a huge step, but that personal growth also needs to be met with greater opportunities once inmates are released. Workshops facilitated by organizations like CBIA, Metro Hartford Alliance, Malta Justice Initiative, Community Partners in Action, local municipalities increase ex-offenders' chances of employment by confronting perceptions that may prevent business owners from considering applicants with a criminal record.

Re-entry efforts have benefits that stretch far beyond the individual to communities and the state as a whole. When formerly-incarcerated can create a life for themselves, children get their fathers and mothers back, communities are revitalized, and the reduced recidivism leads to lower crime rates. The prison system both in the United States and Connecticut is a constant revolving door through which thousands pass each and every year. Unfortunately, many of those entering our prisons are formerly-incarcerated individuals returning after failing to make it on the outside. In Connecticut, over half of released prisoners return within three years of their release, thereby costing taxpayers millions of dollars. This revolving door is powered by the many difficulties faced by the formerly-incarcerated upon their release. The primary obstacle is finding a job. Research performed by the Malta Justice Initiative, also known as MJI, has shown that a criminal record reduces a job applicant's chances of being hired by 15% to 30%. A history of incarceration also reduces the number of weeks worked annually by 6 to 11. It has been reported that as many as 60% of ex-offenders do not hold legitimate employment one year after their release from prison. While the Bureau of Labor Statistics does not keep track of ex-offenders' employment numbers, a January, 2011 New York Times article referenced various studies that such unemployment rate is 50% or higher one year after release.

Statistics compiled by the Administrative Office of the United States Courts in Washington, D.C. indicate that employment is the critical factor in whether released inmates succeed with re-entry. Of the 262,000 federal prisoners released between 2002 and 2006, 50% of those who were not able to secure employment during the period of their supervised release (generally 2-5 years) committed a new crime or violated the terms of their release and ended up back behind bars. However, as reported by the MJI, 93% of those who found jobs throughout their supervised release period did not return to prison. This statistic is astounding. It suggests that our corrections system should be laser focused on securing employment for those released from prison.

The importance of employment in the reentry process is an essential piece to the puzzle.

According to mounting research, it is clear there are significant benefits for our communities in helping men and women that have been in prison, jail, or on probation or parole find employment:

- *Having a job enables individuals to contribute income to their families, which can generate more personal support, stronger positive relationships, enhanced self-esteem, and improved mental health*
- *They are more likely to develop prosocial relationships when their time is structured with work and they are able to help care and provide for their families*
- *Linking individuals with criminal histories to jobs and helping them succeed can reduce the staggering costs to taxpayers for re-incarceration and increases contributions to the tax base for community services*
- *If releases and supervisees are working, their time is being spent in constructive ways and they are then less likely to engage in crime and disorder in their neighborhoods*

It is important to note that although employment clearly plays an important role in reentry, research does not support the proposition that simply placing an individual in a job is a silver

bullet for reducing criminal behaviors. What various studies do suggest is that to reduce criminal behaviors and recidivism, corrections professionals and employment service providers must address individuals' antisocial attitudes and beliefs associated with crime, many of which also impact an individual's ability to succeed in the workplace. The value of integrating the workforce development, corrections, and reentry systems is essential. Employment is a point at which the goals of the criminal justice, workforce development, family services, health and human services, and social services systems can converge. With budget cuts to all these systems, resources must be focused on the right individuals (i.e., people who would benefit the most from interventions), using the right strategies that are delivered at the right time. Improved outcomes for individuals returning to their communities, for their families, and for each system's investments can be realized by better coordinating the correctional supervision, treatment, supports, and other services being delivered at that point of convergence to individuals who have been incarcerated or are on probation or parole.

Workforce development agencies and employment service providers interested in improving outcomes for individuals with criminal histories should draw from criminal justice best practices and collaborate with corrections professionals to develop integrated responses.

Reentry Connections with Employers – there is Hope!  
<http://www.hirenetwork.org/wotc.html>

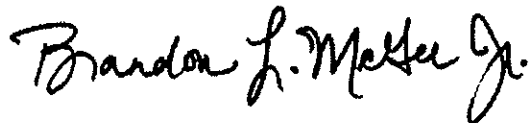
The United States Government offers a federal tax credit of up to \$2,400 for employers who hire individuals from nine targeted groups of job seekers, including individuals with felony records. States can offer an additional tax break to business owners who hire people with criminal records as one way to support the re-entry of those who are legitimately trying to return to the job market in order to support their families and rejoin their communities.

- *Six states - California, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, Maryland, and Texas - provide state income tax credits to employers who hire people with criminal records. In 1998, the Hawaii Legislature proposed an employment discrimination measure that would have required the state to “appeal to the community spirit and good citizenship” in order to encourage employers to hire individuals with arrest and court records. Even though this measure was never passed, it was suggested that a tax incentive should be provided for employers who hired recently released felons.*
- *Five states - Florida, Missouri, Indiana, Delaware and Pennsylvania - have statutes that allow for the receipt of tax credits for any business that contributes to crime prevention. Upon further inquiry, it is clear that crime prevention refers primarily to location, not to individuals.*

A significant percentage of inmates are violent and pose a serious threat to public safety. Such violent offenders are justifiably incarcerated. Improved public safety is not the only argument advanced in favor of tough on crime laws. Victims' rights, retribution, deterrence and accountability are also cited in support of tough sentencing laws (such as three strikes) and laws that deny public benefits to felony offenders (e.g., public housing and welfare assistance) or preclude ex-offenders from qualifying for certain professions.

We need to encourage more of the innovative re-entry efforts like the ones I had the privilege of viewing. It will take all of us working together to ensure that everyone really does get a second chance. We need to bring together a broad group of partners — not only government but businesses, nonprofits, and community organizations — to create re-entry programs that prevent recidivism and put formerly incarcerated people on a path to success. Some such programs are already underway in Connecticut, and we should build on and expand these efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brandon L. McGee Jr." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'B' and a distinct 'Jr.' at the end.

Representative Brandon McGee