



TO: The Honorable Stephanie Rawlings Blake
and Members of the Baltimore City Council
Room 400 City Hall,
100. N. Holiday Street
Attn: Karen Randle

FROM: Jean Lewis, Deputy Director, Mayor's Office on Criminal Justice

DATE: July 25, 2008

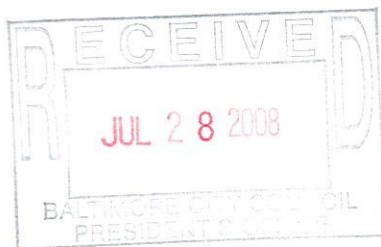
RE: City Council Bill No. 08-0033R

City Council Bill No.: **08-0033R – Investigative Hearing – Hospitality Industry
– Employment of the Homeless and Ex-Offenders**

The Mayor's Office on Criminal Justice (MOCJ) supports the expansion of employment opportunities for people returning to the community from prison and jail.

With the exception of its summer program for youth referred by the Department of Juvenile Services and the Parole and Probation Division, MOCJ does not provide employment placement services. Rather, MOCJ works to coordinate criminal justice strategies within and among the City's agencies and to form partnerships with state and federal agencies, community groups and non-profit organizations to address crime and criminal justice issues. This work naturally includes consideration and coordination of policies that impact the many people who return to Baltimore from prison and jail each year.

As the Council has recognized, the impact of reentry on Baltimore is significant. Two-thirds of the people released from state prison -- some 9000 people -- come back to communities in Baltimore each year. Even more people come back to our communities from the jail. Excluding the many people who go through booking but are not committed to custody, about 100 people are released from the jail each day. That amounts to approximately 35,000



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people being released from the jail per year; the number increases to 90,000 if everyone brought to booking is included.

These individuals are returning to our most vulnerable communities. Almost half of the people returning from prison return to just six zip codes (21213, 21215, 21216, 21217, 21218, 21223). And half of those returning from prison are being released due to the expiration of their sentence, so are not under the supervision of a parole or probation officer.

Additionally, the needs of people returning to our communities are often complex. We know from national statistics that:

- 60% of those in jail have not graduated from high school or received a GED;
- 68% of those in jail have substance abuse problems;
- 24% show symptoms of psychosis;
- 37% report a current medical problem (including chronic diseases, infectious diseases and injuries); and
- 30% were unemployed during the month before incarceration.

Baltimore is fortunate to have in place a unique one-stop employment center that is focused on helping people returning from prison find and maintain meaningful employment. The Reentry Center (the ReC), operated by the Mayor's Office of Employment Development since July 2005, provides an assortment of job preparation resources, including computer labs for training, resume preparation and job searches, and access to voicemail, fax machines and copiers. It also provides access to other services that are designed to help remove barriers to employment. These services include case management, assistance obtaining identification cards, expungement work shops, assistance with child support obligations, information about bonding available to employers, and an onsite parole/probation officer. Several agencies and community based organizations offer their services at the ReC on a regular basis. These partnerships and the expertise of those who work at the ReC will be extremely helpful as additional employment opportunities for ex-offenders are identified.

This Administration's commitment to reentry issues is underscored by Mayor Dixon's chairmanship of the U.S. Conference of Mayors' Reentry Task Force. The Reentry Task Force brought together mayors from across the country at its first meeting in June; it offers a valuable forum to exchange ideas and lessons learned with leaders of other cities.

In recognition that employment is a critical component of successful reentry, Mayor Dixon recently taped a clip for the Job Opportunities Task Force's "pastforward" campaign. This is a campaign to persuade employers in the Baltimore area to consider employing people despite criminal convictions in their backgrounds. The campaign includes a website (www.pastforwardmd.org) that features videoclips from several area employers and employees, all with the strong message that it is in fact possible to have a criminal background and be a strong employee.

As additional employers are encouraged to consider employment of ex-offenders, it is important to note that the City has taken steps to do the same. Baltimore has "banned the box" that asks about prior convictions from City employment applications. This means that except for certain "positions of trust," City job applicants are no longer asked to disclose any information about their criminal backgrounds on job applications. The City continues to conduct criminal background checks on persons applying for specific positions of trust, including for example, senior officials, employees handling finances or confidential information and employees working with children. That confidential procedure, however, will be conducted by a human resource specialist. This policy change will expand the job opportunities for people returning from prison.

MOCJ supports the Council's efforts to increase the availability of employment opportunities for ex-offenders within the hospitality industry and will, to the extent it can, help to coordinate the other support services that may be necessary to make those employment experiences meaningful.



Jean Lewis
Deputy Director
Mayor's Office on Criminal Justice