



Workforce Opportunities for Returning Citizens PUBLIC POLICY AGENDA

Approved by the Chamber Board of Directors November 18, 2019

The Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce (KC Chamber), representing over 2,000 employers in the Greater Kansas City area, recognizes that crime threatens regional economic growth and prosperity. The KC Chamber understands that an important mean to break the cycle of crime is to offer a stable, long-term jobs for formerly incarcerated individuals. The KC Chamber also believes that successfully including returning citizens in the region's labor pool will assist in alleviating the workforce shortage for employers, increase productivity, ease burdens on our governments and taxpayers, and create a more inclusive regional economy. The Bureau of Justice indicates that returning citizens who are employed after one year have a 16% recidivism rate versus the national one-year recidivism rate of over 40%. The KC Chamber urges support for policies that not only will make Greater Kansas City a safer place to live and work, but also dismantle the intertwined cycles of crime and poverty through investment in policies and programs that support better outcomes for those involved in our criminal justice system and for their families. The KC Chamber believes:

- **Probation/Parole:** Expanded probation, parole, and community supervision programs are effective ways to ensure suitable offenders are rehabilitated while also allowing returning citizens to maintain employment, remain with families and other support networks, and ease the burden on state institutions.
- **Sentencing Guidelines:** Sentencing guidelines, especially those related to drug and other non-violent offenses, should enhance public safety, reduce long-term stress on state and local budgets, state agencies and families. Holding so many people in incarceration does not lead to enhanced public safety, but rather, leads to disenfranchised citizens, separated homes and strained state and local resources.
- **Driver's Licenses:** The suspension of driver's licenses due to being, "too poor to pay," creates a cycle of indebtedness and incarceration for the poor in our community. Holding people responsible for delinquent payments can be achieved through more effective, more constructive and less intrusive means.
- **Professional Licensure/Certification:** Individuals within our correctional institutions should be able to receive professional licensures and certificates, or make progress towards the same, that help make them employable upon release.
- **Criminal Justice Infrastructure:** Our criminal justice institutions in both states should meet standards of safety and decency for inmates and employees, alike, while also providing adequate, wholistic education and life-skills training for successful reentry upon release. The Chamber also believes innovative approaches to incarceration, such as specialty institutions, will reduce recidivism.
- **Drug, Alcohol and Mental Health:** Increased resources for treatment and justice options for the mentally ill and chemically dependent will ease the burden on our law enforcement officers and local jails and will also be more effective in long-term wholistic healing rather than incarceration for the mentally ill.
- **Data Sharing:** Increased access and collaboration of data sharing among state agencies and departments will help prevent crime from occurring in the first place and improve outcomes and treatment options for the currently incarcerated and for returning citizens.