Stable employment – like stable housing, family and community support, and access to substance abuse and mental health treatment – is critical to the rehabilitation, stability and successful reentry of individuals who have been incarcerated and are returning to our communities. We all benefit when individuals formerly involved with the justice system are able to obtain employment earning family-sustaining wages. And conversely, if reentry fails, we all pay the price.

THE ADMINISTRATION’S COMMITMENT TO EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL

As part of its efforts to restore the economy and get Americans back to work, the Administration is working to reduce barriers to employment for individuals with past criminal involvement. These efforts help individuals who have paid their debt compete for work opportunities to support themselves and their families, pay their taxes, and contribute to the economy.

- The Federal Interagency Reentry Council, chaired by Attorney General Eric Holder and comprised of 22 federal agencies, was launched in 2011 with a goal to make communities safer by facilitating successful reentry for the formerly incarcerated, including in the area of employment.

- The Department of Justice (DOJ) and the Department of Labor (DOL) have provided substantial funding under the Second Chance Act (SCA) and Workforce Investment Act for workforce development and support services to the formerly incarcerated.

- The Department of Education (ED) has implemented programs to support successful reentry from adult and juvenile correctional facilities into education, employment, and community programs.

- The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), DOL and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) have provided guidance to employers on how to navigate employment decisions involving job applicants with criminal histories.

- The Small Business Administration (SBA) published a rule for comment that would expand eligibility for microloans, including for people on probation or parole provided their offense did not involve fraud, dishonesty, or, for child care businesses, offenses involving children.

A YEAR OF ACTION: BUILDING ON PROGRESS

On June 30, 2014, the White House was pleased to host a day-long event focused on improving employment outcomes for individuals with a criminal record. The event included a Champions of Change program honoring individuals around the country who are doing extraordinary work
to facilitate employment opportunities for individuals formerly involved with the justice system, and featuring **Attorney General Eric Holder** and other senior Administration officials. In addition, the White House event, in partnership with the Council of State Government’s Justice Center (CSG), included a half-day summit, *Pathways to Prosperity: How Public and Private Sectors Can Put People with Criminal Records to Work*, which brought together business leaders, corrections experts and workforce development and labor professionals to discuss collaborative and evidence-supported strategies for improving public safety, employment rates, and quality of the workforce. The summit featured **Labor Secretary Tom Perez** and other senior Administration officials.

In addition, the Administration continues to focus on the recidivism-reducing benefits of expanding employment opportunities for reentering individuals.

**STRENGTHENING EDUCATION AND TRAINING TO IMPROVE EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES**

**Investing in Technology Career Training** – DOJ’s Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) is awarding six Technology Career Training grants to state and local jurisdictions across the country. These grants total nearly $4 million, and are designed to increase the post-release employability of the incarcerated population in technology-based jobs and career fields. Each grant focuses on training for fields with high demand from local employers.

**Better Serving Justice-Involved Youth** – ED and DOJ recently issued a joint guidance letter from Secretary Duncan and Attorney General Holder outlining core principles of high-quality education for juveniles in confinement. The Departments now are partnering to identify and share information on effective juvenile education reentry practices and to support juvenile reentry education demonstration projects. Similarly, DOL is issuing a Training and Employment Notice outlining “Strategies for Using Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Youth Funds to Serve Court-Involved Youth,” with the goal of improving education and workforce development services in the juvenile justice system. This Notice highlights promising examples of DOL’s Reintegration of Ex-Offenders (RExO) justice-involved youth initiatives and shares strategies to consider when designing and operating justice involved youth projects.

**Connecting Youth to Opportunity** – DOL will launch a Youth Challenge Program with the Department of Defense and the National Guard Bureau that will provide educational and job training skills for non-violent adjudicated youth.

**Preparing Justice-Involved Individuals for the Workforce** – DOL is issuing a guidebook for organizations preparing justice-involved youth and adults for employment, with information on lowering job barriers for these individuals, increasing clients’ chances of staying in the workplace, and addressing the unique needs of women. In addition, DOL is releasing a series of “tip sheets” addressing special areas of concern for women exiting correctional facilities, including an employment-focused resource.
Building Effective Employer-Driven Job Training and Placement – The National Institute of Corrections will publish “The Employer Driven Model and Toolkit: Strategies for Developing Employment Opportunities for Justice-Involved Individuals,” intended to provide practitioners serving employers and reentering citizens with a blueprint and resources to build an effective employer-driven job training and placement program for former justice-involved populations.

Field-Testing Integrated Reentry Employment Strategies – DOL and DOJ are working with CSG to field-test strategies from the “Integrated Reentry and Employment Strategies” framework in selected jurisdictions receiving DOL RExO or DOJ SCA Act funds, and also to provide training and technical assistance. The framework provides guidance to policymakers, agency and program administrators and practitioners on how to maximize public safety and workforce investments by using evidence-based tools to assess individuals’ risk for reincarceration and using that information to tailor services to their distinct needs.

ENGAGING AND INCENTIVIZING EMPLOYERS

One-Stop Website for Employers – DOL is expanding its business portal at www.CareerOneStop.org/reentry to include information for employers seeking to hire formerly incarcerated persons and/or court-involved youth. The portal will provide employers a one-stop-shop location to find federal tools, guidance and other supports available to employers.

Promoting Entrepreneurship – The SBA is developing an interactive entrepreneurship training module and online curriculum to teach individuals who are reentering communities to start and sustain their own businesses. The module will incorporate a blended learning format, including a skills assessment tool, readiness preparation, and business plan development.

Promoting Model Employment Practices – In partnership with BJA and DOL, CSG and the Legal Action Center will conduct a national employer education and engagement project to increase the number of employers that adopt best practice standards on the proper use of criminal records in hiring. The “Best Practice Standards Project” builds on the practice standards guidebook, Best Practice Standards: The Proper Use of Criminal Records in Hiring, which addresses employers’ concerns about hiring applicants with criminal histories and outlines practical steps employers and background screeners can use in investigating and evaluating job applicants while complying with all relevant federal and state laws.

Educating Employers and Employees Regarding Rights and Obligations – The EEOC is implementing a comprehensive education and training program to educate employers and workers about the applicability of its updated 2012 guidance on the use of arrest and conviction records in employment. Following the adoption of the guidance, across FY2013 and FY2014, the Commission conducted approximately 900 events on the topic, reaching approximately 80,000 individuals. As part of this program, the EEOC is collaborating with federal agency partners on joint trainings and outreach.
Engaging Federal Contractors – OPM, DOL’s Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs and the EEOC will conduct a joint webcast for federal contracting officials to ensure they are familiar with the rules and best practices regarding nondiscrimination and federal contractors’ use of criminal background checks to screen applicants for employment.

ENCOURAGING INNOVATION AND EVIDENCE-BUILDING

Facilitating Access to Electronic Information Resources for Reentry Preparation – The Federal Interagency Reentry Council is releasing two “Reentry Myth Busters” on using technology to prepare incarcerated adults and juveniles in secure facilities for reentry and particularly employment success. Adult correctional agencies are advised to consider available and evolving security solutions to allow for the provision of internet access so that the incarcerated can seek employment, pursue educational goals, obtain employment relevant certifications, and address other employment-related needs such as required documentation, health insurance, child support payments, transportation, and housing. The juvenile-focused myth buster describes opportunities to enhance educational development through expanded use of technology resources. ED is preparing to disseminate supplemental information resources amplifying this information for both adult correctional agencies and for juvenile justice agencies.

Using Technology to Facilitate Reentry for Formerly Incarcerated Individuals – The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy and ED recently hosted a workshop to discuss safe and cost-effective technology to help incarcerated individuals research employment opportunities, pursue educational goals, obtain employment-related credentials, apply for jobs, financial aid and benefits, address outstanding legal issues, and search for housing, as well as promote the digital literacy of inmates.

Commitment by Apploi to Provide Mobile Kiosks – Apploi, a company that connects job-seekers and employers through a mobile app, will provide 50 iPad kiosks to locations that serve the reentry community and will highlight jobs with companies that have expressed interest in hiring from this population. With more than 1200 companies hiring through their system, Apploi enables job-seekers, including those who have non-traditional educational or work experiences and gaps in their employment history, to showcase their skills and other talents while giving employers the technology to better select and hire candidates. Apploi’s technology, which operates in a secure environment and without access to internet or web browsers, will allow users to connect with jobs anywhere in the country.

Using Data and Evidence to Identify Programs That Work – The National Institute of Corrections is conducting a validation study of the Employment Retention Inventory in collaboration with the Urban Institute. Developed to help correctional staff and stakeholders identify the precursors, obstacles and personality traits influencing a justice-involved individual’s gainful attachment to the workforce, the research also will explore the relationship between employment retention and recidivism. Similarly, DOL and DOJ are engaging in
rigorous evaluations of the performance and outcomes of the RExO and SCA grantees’ programs.

**Assessing the Impact of Industry-Recognized Credentials** – ED has commissioned a study to examine the impact of industry-recognized credentialing programs on the employability of recently incarcerated individuals, and also to highlight promising practices. The study will build on important, recently released research on correctional education funded by BJA, which found that there is an increasing emphasis on offering vocational education programs that lead to a nationally or industry-recognized certificate.

**Note:** Below are the video Links to the panels at the day-long event:

- Business Roundtable featuring Secretary Perez: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JIpXK87GAhM
- Federal Tools Panel featuring Portia Wu and Denise O’Donnell: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0W5IrU67i0k
- Closing Remarks by Jacqueline Berrien and Karol Mason: http://youtu.be/UHtvzxDQRUA
- Champions of Change panel with Eric Holder: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RNXh95v5NJE