

Safe & Just
Michigan

State's Economy Needs Second Chance Hiring, Says Economist and Author Korzenik

With hundreds of thousands of unfilled jobs, economy needs stability

LANSING — **Jeffrey Korzenik**, author of “Untapped Talent: How Second Chance Hiring Benefits Your Business and the Community,” urged business leaders to give the 1 in 3 Americans who have a criminal record a second chance when it comes to hiring during an event at the state Capitol on Tuesday. During the event, which was sponsored by Lansing-based Safe & Just Michigan, Korzenik said these potential workers could go a long way toward solving the current worker shortage crisis that has left [hundreds of thousands of Michigan jobs are unfilled](#). But in order to fully maximize their potential, further criminal justice reform is needed.

Michigan has seen several criminal justice reforms in recent years, such as Clean Slate expungement expansion and the increased availability of professional licensing for people with a criminal record. Current proposals under consideration include a plan to overhaul Michigan's cash bail system and a proposal to end juvenile life without parole sentencing.

“Businesses are facing an unprecedented labor shortage. Employers cannot afford to overlook the talents found in the justice-impacted population,” Korzenik said. “Sourced right and supported appropriately, this is a pathway to a loyal and engaged workforce.”

During his presentation Tuesday, Korzenik said that nationwide, there are 11 million job openings, but just 5 million people looking for work. That shortfall of 6 million workers should have entrepreneurs and hiring managers looking for innovative ways to fill those open positions, he said.

One of the best ways to fill those open jobs and draw more people into the workforce is to turn to a source of labor that for decades has gone ignored: people with a criminal record. Up to now, many companies — from small mom-and-pop shops to major corporations — have routinely excluded anyone who has a criminal record, even if that record is decades old and unrelated to the open position at hand. That attitude ignores a wealth of research that finds that formerly incarcerated

people are often a company's more loyal and dedicated workers. [A 2019 survey from SHRM](#), an organization for human resource managers, found that:

- More than 82 percent of hiring managers polled said workers with a criminal history are a high-quality hire equal to or even more effective than those without a criminal history.
- 74 percent found an “extreme value” in hiring those with a criminal history.
- Hiring managers and HR professionals cited three effects on the larger ecosystem as benefits: hiring most-qualified candidates from a truly diverse pool; the intrinsic value of giving people second chances at employment; and the opportunity to improve the community around them.

However, to truly maximize the benefits of second-chance hiring, further criminal justice reform is needed, said John S. Cooper, executive director of Safe & Just Michigan. For instance, reforming cash bail would allow businesses to have a more reliable workforce rather than losing their employees when they can't meet bail demands.

“Cash bail isn't necessary for public safety,” **John S. Cooper** said. “Cash bail simply creates two different standards of justice: one for people with financial means and one for people without. There's no reason to think that a person who can meet bail demands is any safer to the public than someone who cannot.”

Korzenik said reforms that create solutions for business owners, workers and the community at large are the kinds of solutions that are needed.

“There are not many win-win policies in economics, but prudent reforms that help people stay employed support both economic prosperity and public safety,” Korzenik said.

A video of this presentation will be made available on Safe & Just Michigan's YouTube page at bit.ly/YouTubeSJM

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Safe & Just Michigan (www.safeandjustmi.org) works to advance policies that end Michigan's over-use of incarceration and promote community safety and healing. We partner with Michigan organizations and leaders from across the political spectrum, including business and community leaders, faith communities, crime survivor organizations, formerly incarcerated individuals, prisoners and their families, as well as Michigan taxpayers statewide.