

Talking Points From the Numbers

General Audience:

- According to the U.S. Department of Justice, the largest key predictor of whether a person will recidivate (return to prison after release) is poverty and lack of housing. Therefore, things that combat these conditions — such as good jobs, advanced education and safe, secure housing — lead to less recidivism, which means safer communities for everyone.
- However, a combination of laws and social stigmas often keep people with a criminal record out of good jobs and housing. These laws and stigmas are sometimes known as “collateral consequences.”
- Examples of collateral consequences can include being:
 - Summarily rejected from good jobs by employers who refuse to hire anyone with a criminal record.
 - Refused apartment leases by landlords who won't rent to anyone with a felony conviction.
 - Rejected by college admissions departments that are wary of having students with a criminal history on campus.
 - Turned down by schools as chaperones for their children's field trips because of their criminal record.
- These collateral consequences can continue for years or even decades after a sentence has been served, even if there is no further involvement with the legal system.
- Many people experiencing collateral consequences simply want a second chance and to show they are no longer the same person they were when they were convicted.
- Formerly incarcerated people want to be known by what they have accomplished since their release. Some of them have become social workers or business owners. Others are ministers or founders of nonprofits. They volunteer for local charities and become active in local, state and national politics. Many have become parents or grandparents.
- When people are allowed to contribute all of their talents and abilities to their community, the community benefits as well as the person. We believe in second chances.

Questions? Contact Safe & Just Michigan, at 517.482.7753 or info@safeandjustmi.org

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Business Community:

- It's no secret that hiring managers and entrepreneurs are looking everywhere for good employees. The "great resignation," the pandemic and increased job opportunities have led to workers leaving jobs in record numbers — and left companies scrambling to fill the void.
- At the same time, many companies utterly refuse to hire anyone who has a criminal record, especially a felony.
- However, studies of U.S. Army service members and from the American Civil Liberties Union and the human resources organization SHRM, among others, have found that formerly incarcerated people can be among the most reliable workers available.
- At the same time, new laws in Michigan are making it possible for formerly incarcerated people to obtain professional and occupational licenses that once were out of reach for them, such as those needed to work in carpentry, cosmetology, real estate and other lines of work.
- "Second chance hiring" — or the practice of giving justice-involved people an opportunity to demonstrate they are able and enthusiastic employees — can be a lifeline to businesses that have found it difficult to find and keep people on the job.
- Second chance hiring also improves local economies by providing good jobs to a pool of people who have struggled to find any job at all — a 2018 study found the unemployment rate for formerly incarcerated people hovers around 27 percent, and that was before the pandemic.
- For these reasons, the business community stands to benefit from taking a leading role in helping formerly incarcerated people reintegrate into their communities.

Faith Communities:

- Most — if not all — faith traditions hold redemption and second chances to be core values.
- Congregations are already intrinsically involved in their communities, from holding regular worship services to hosting soup kitchens, day or overnight shelters for unhoused people, providing counseling for people struggling with substance use issues or mental health concerns and more.
- Many faith communities are also active inside prisons, providing people who are incarcerated with an avenue for personal growth, teaching responsibility and accountability and providing them with a place to seek out companionship, understanding and compassion once they return to their community.
- By helping to meet the spiritual needs of formerly incarcerated people, faith communities are helping to curb recidivism. A recent study found that the closer a person released from prison adhered to a faith community, the less likely they were to return to prison.
- Churches, mosques, synagogues, temples and other communities of faith can play an integral part in helping people become fully contributing members of their community, which in turn makes their neighborhoods safer for everyone.

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Crime Survivors:

- People who have survived crime — particularly a violent crime — deserve to see those who caused the harm to be held accountable and to feel safe in their communities once again.
- Research from Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice finds that crime survivors in Michigan feel the criminal justice system doesn't address their needs:
 - 1 in 4 Michiganders have been a victim of a crime in between 2008-2018, and of those, 48 percent survived a violent crime.
 - By a margin of 4 to 1, survivors of crime believe that prison makes people more likely to commit further crimes rather than rehabilitating them.
 - By a margin of 8 to 1, crime survivors want Michigan to invest more in job training and workforce development rather than prisons and jails.
 - The survey found that crime survivors want support services such as financial assistance to offset losses associated with the crime, help with medical costs arising from the harm, counseling, legal assistance, housing and information about available resources — but these needs often go unmet.
 - Most of all, crime survivors said that what they want is to make sure what happened to them does not happen to anyone else.
- If we want to honor survivors of crime and their wishes, we should funnel our activity into the prevention of crime rather than harsh punishments.
- Research has repeatedly shown that after a person has completed a prison sentence and come home, the leading predictors of their success are factors such as their ability to find meaningful work, a safe and stable place to live and to avoid poverty.
- This is why supporting the full reintegration of people back home is crucial to prevent crime and support crime survivors in feeling safe in their community. If returnees are unable to work or find a place to live, they are pushed to the margins of society and more likely to resort to crime to sustain themselves.

Law Enforcement/Public Safety Communities:

- People who have been involved in committing harm and who have completed a court-ordered sentence have "done the time" that society has asked of them.
- Those who have been released on parole regularly have job requirements that demand that they find meaningful work as a condition of parole.
- Even so, unemployment among formerly incarcerated people hovers around 27 percent. This is largely because many employers have policies against hiring anyone with a criminal record.
- Many justice-involved or formerly incarcerated people also struggle to find housing, as many landlords also refuse to rent to people with a record, particularly if it has felony convictions.
- The stigmas against hiring or renting to formerly incarcerated people often leads people to recidivate, as the greatest predictors of post-prison success are the ability to find a job, secure a safe place to live and avoid poverty, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.
- Therefore, people who are entrusted to protect public safety have a vested interest in seeing formerly incarcerated people succeed in their home communities after release, and this includes seeing them find good-paying jobs, affordable housing and becoming fully participating members of their community.

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