



SECOND CHANCE OCCUPATIONAL LICENSING REFORM

February 2024

Many state laws prevent ex-offenders from working in occupations that require a license, even if they have served their time and the crime was nonviolent.

NEARLY

80 million Americans have a criminal record.¹



MORE THAN

95% of the U.S. prison population is eventually **released to reenter society**.²

95%



At least half of ex-offenders are arrested again

in the years following their release, often because of a **failure to reintegrate into society and find a job**.³

Former inmates who **stay employed for one year** post-release are

35% LESS LIKELY



to commit another crime compared to those who don't have a job.⁴

The criminal justice system costs the U.S. more than

\$270 billion annually.⁵



There are more than **25,000 limitations** across all states for ex-offenders to earn occupational or business licenses.⁶



NEARLY **1 in 4 jobs in America** requires a license.⁷



States with more barriers to occupational licensing experienced a **9% increase** in recidivism rates.

States with fewer barriers experienced a **2.5% decrease** in recidivism rates.⁸



Policymakers should support occupational licensing reforms that create a path for ex-offenders without a history of violent felonies or sexual offenses to earn a license, such as:

- ★ Prevent licensing boards from denying a license based on vague “good moral character” or “moral turpitude” requirements.
- ★ Prevent licensing boards from denying a license based on an arrest that did not lead to a conviction.
- ★ Create court-issued employability certificates for ex-offenders who have been rehabilitated to use when applying for a license.
- ★ Allow ex-offenders to petition a licensing board to see if they are disqualified from the license before they complete training, education, or exams.
- ★ Prevent licensing boards from denying a license to an ex-offender due to a crime committed many years ago for which the threat of recidivism is low.