



SECOND CHANCE OCCUPATIONAL LICENSING REFORM IN VIRGINIA

February 2024

In Virginia, state law often prevents ex-offenders from working in occupations that require a license, even if they have served their time and the crime was nonviolent.

NEARLY
1.6
million Virginians
have a criminal record.¹



OVER
12,000

inmates in Virginia are released from prison each year and reenter society.²



20% of ex-offenders in Virginia are arrested again

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

Recidivism costs Virginia more than

\$400
million annually.⁴



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.

NEARLY
1 in 5
jobs in Virginia requires a license.⁵



9%
States with more barriers to occupational licensing experienced a **9% increase** in recidivism rates.⁶

States with fewer barriers experienced a **2.5% decrease** in recidivism rates.⁷



Virginia 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:

- ★ Allow ex-offenders to petition a licensing board to see if they are disqualified from the license before they complete training, education, or exams.
- ★ Extend the state's ban on blanket criminal history bans to include licenses issued by the health department.
- ★ Prevent licensing boards from denying a license based on vague "good moral character" or "moral turpitude" requirements.
- ★ 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.
- ★ Block licensing boards from denying a license to an ex-offender based on their criminal records unless the crime is directly related to the occupation.
- ★ Prevent licensing boards from denying a license to an applicant based on an arrest that did not lead to a conviction of a crime.