



# From Incarceration to Employment: Investments in Rehabilitation

## Investment in incarcerated individuals and the barriers to employment

Educational and workforce training are essential elements of the rehabilitation process and are valuable tools for lowering recidivism rates. A [report](#) from the National Institute of Justice on correctional programming referenced a meta-analysis of research on education programming that concluded that participation in education programming can reduce recidivism rates by up to 43 percent and can increase the odds of post-release employment by 13 percent. Education is a significant predictor of success since individuals are less likely to commit crime when they work and have stable and satisfying employment that they believe has the potential for a career. Vocational programming also plays a factor in the success of formerly incarcerated individuals. Employment programming has been generally found to reduce both violent and nonviolent prison misconduct and disciplinary infractions and to improve post-release employment outcomes for offenders.

## Current Correctional Programming

The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections offers a number of training and education programs to prepare inmates for success upon their release. All inmates entering into the correctional system are classified at either SCI Camp Hill, SCI Graterford (males) or SCI Muncy (females). The Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) is one of the educational assessments administered during the classification process. Any inmate who does not possess a GED or high school diploma is mandated to attend 360 hours of academic programming. Educational programs offered by the Department of Corrections include:

- Adult Basic Education
- English as a Second Language
- the ADULT Commonwealth Secondary Diploma Program
- Vocational Education and Certification Programs
  - Business Education
  - Cosmetology (Barber)
  - Plumbing
  - HVAC.

For a full list of vocational programs and certifications available by prison, see: [PA Correctional Programming](#).

In addition to the standard educational programs provided by the Department of Corrections, some correctional facilities offer several unique education and employment opportunities, including Prison Correctional Industries, the Inside-Out Program, and the Second Chance Pell Program.

### Prison Correctional Industries (PCI)

[Prison Correctional Industries \(PCI\)](#) is an independent industry within the Department of Corrections that employs inmates to produce a variety of items that are available for sale to non-profit organizations and government entities located throughout the commonwealth. Products manufactured by inmates range from apparel and bags to exercise equipment and license plates. During the Covid-19 pandemic, PCI produced masks, gowns, hand sanitizer, and other related supplies that were a key aid to the DOC when these supplies were scarce. To learn more about the various products offered from PCI, see: [PCI Online Catalog](#).

At PCI, inmates learn marketable job skills in state-of-the-art production and manufacturing operations. PCI workers are required to be team players, and learn to be dependable, punctual, reliable, and timely. Workers must learn to follow directions and develop problem solving skills. PCI offers inmates, who may have entered the correctional system without having held a job, the opportunity to learn work skills that will benefit them upon their release.

PCI employs over 1,500 state inmates at 20 different State Correctional Institutions (SCIs). PCI does not receive funding from the General Fund; instead, this program is self-sustaining through the sale of PCI products and services. Wages earned through jobs with PCI contribute to an inmate's cost of incarceration, legal financial obligations, victim restitution, family support, and an inmate account. The pay scale for PCI inmates ranges from \$0.19 to \$0.42 per hour depending on the skill level required. Some operations can qualify for production, attendance, or quality bonuses that can increase the hourly salary to a maximum of \$1.12 per hour.

### First Step Initiative

In 2022, the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry was awarded a \$10 million federal grant. The grant was funded through the U.S. department of Labor's First Step Act initiative via the Employment and Training Administration. The First Step Initiative is a collaboration between:

- PA Department of Labor and Industry
- Pennsylvania Workforce Development Board
- Pennsylvania Department of Corrections
- Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs
- PA Commission on Crime and Delinquency
- Pennsylvania Reentry Council
- local workforce development boards
- nonprofit reentry services and coalitions
- employers and employer groups

The funds will be used to create a re-entry program that aims to reduce recidivism among formerly incarcerated individuals by creating a network of job-training and skills-development services through L&I. The grant funding will also be used to provide inmates at minimum- and low-security federal prisons within Pennsylvania with vocational education prior to release.

### Inside-Out Program

Developed by Temple University, the Inside-Out program brings together college students and incarcerated students with the intent to facilitate informative dialogue. This program originated from the belief that when people of opposite social classes are brought together and engage with each other as equals, there is an opportunity for these groups to collectively engender solutions to social concerns. This semester-long program is held in a prison, jail or other correctional setting. The Inside-Out program now operates internationally with over 200 partnerships between correctional institutions of institutions of higher education.

### Second Chance Pell Program

Through the Second Chance Pell Program, eligible inmates are awarded a federal Pell Grant to pursue postsecondary education with the goal of helping them obtain family sustaining jobs upon their release. The Second Chance Pell Program was established in 2016 as an experiment to determine if higher education had a notable impact on the recidivism rate. Research is still ongoing to determine the impact of this program on recidivism and a final report is expected in 2022.

Funding for this program is provided through the U.S Department of Education's Second Chance Act Award. Villanova matches the Pell funds with endowment funding for their programs. A limited number of incarcerated individuals are awarded scholarships. Currently, six higher education institutions partner with the commonwealth to administer this program at six state correctional intuitions.



<b>Educational Institution</b>	<b>Courses offered for a...</b>	<b>State Correctional Institution</b>
Bloomsburg University	24 credit Certificate in Rehabilitative Justice	SCI Muncy SCI Mahanoy
Eastern University	60 credit Associates of the Arts degree in Liberal Arts	SCI Chester
Indiana University of Pennsylvania	60 credit Associates of the Arts degree in General Studies	SCI Pine Grove SCI Houtzdale
University of Scranton	60 credit Associates of the Arts degree in Liberal studies	SCI Dallas SCI Waymart
Villanova University	60-120 credit Associates of the Arts and Bachelor of Arts degrees	SCI Phoenix
Lehigh Carbon Community College	60 credit Associates of the Arts degree in Liberal Arts	SCI Frackville

## **Funding**

In 2022/23, \$45.8 million was appropriated for correctional education training. This was an increase from \$42.6 million in 2021/22.

## **Policy Reform**

In an effort to eliminate employment barriers and modernize the commonwealth's job licensing structure for individuals with a criminal history, the General Assembly and Governor Wolf have implemented several criminal justice reform measures, including the initiatives below.

### **Licensure Reform (Act 53 of 2020)**

On July 1, 2020 Act 53 (previously SB 637) was signed into law. Act 53 changes state licensure policy to ensure criminal convictions do not automatically preclude an individual from obtaining an occupational license.

Act 53 makes the following notable changes to the Commonwealth's 29 occupational licensing boards:

- Prohibits boards and commissions from using an individual's criminal history to preclude them from receiving an occupational license, unless the crime is directly related to the license they wish to obtain. This includes juvenile convictions or convictions that have been expunged.
- Mandates the Department of State to develop a best practice guide to assist applicants with a criminal history who are seeking to obtain a license.
- Requires licensing commissioners to publish a schedule of criminal convictions that may constitute grounds to refuse to issue, suspend or revoke a license, certificate, registration or permit for each occupation or profession.
- Allows boards and commissions to issue preliminary decisions expressing the likelihood that an individual with a criminal record would qualify for a license, to save the individual's resources on training and fees.
- Establishes restricted licenses for some reentrants who would otherwise be denied a license based on their criminal history but received training in a correctional facility for an occupation that requires a license, registration, or permit to engage in that occupation.



## Clean Slate

Act 57 of 2018, also known as Clean Slate, allows minor, non-violent cases to be automatically sealed from public view after a set amount of time has passed without a new conviction of a felony or misdemeanor. Any offense sealed under Clean Slate is not required to be reported to employers, landlords, or colleges, and they may not be used to deny state occupational licenses.

The process for sealing a record is an automated process and qualifying individuals do not need to pay a fee or initiate court proceedings to have their criminal records (for certain offenses) sealed after the criteria and time frames have been met. On June 28, 2019, the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) and Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) began identifying and completing the processing of records that are eligible for Clean Slate Limited Access.

Act 83 of 2020 expanded Clean Slate by extending automatic expungement to anyone who received a full acquittal or pardon from the governor. Act 83 also removed the requirement that applicants pay court fines and costs. Individuals must still pay restitution before having their records sealed.

As of September 2021, the PSP and AOPC have processed nearly 37 million records.

## [Executive Order 2017-3: Review of State Professional and Occupational Licensure Board Requirements and Processes](#)

In 2017, Governor Wolf signed an executive order that mandated the review of job licensing and established a task force to champion the effort. The governor's task force produced a [report](#), which determined that an individual's prior criminal history can have a notable impact on an applicant's ability to acquire a professional license. For instance, 13 of the commonwealth's licensing boards had a mandatory 10-year licensure ban on all applicants who were convicted of a drug related felony. In addition, all boards were required by law to consider an applicant's criminal conviction when making licensure decisions. These policies denied thousands of Pennsylvanians an opportunity to obtain family-sustaining employment.

## Ban the box

To further eliminate detrimental employment barriers, Governor Wolf announced in 2017 that state agencies under his jurisdiction will remove the criminal conviction question on non-civil service employment applications (also known as "banning the box"). This policy provides individuals with an opportunity to be judged based on their skills and qualifications, rather than their criminal past. Ban the box provides millions of Pennsylvanians a fair chance at employment and an opportunity to contribute to society.

Ban the box does not prohibit criminal background checks.

Governor Wolf has encouraged agencies that are not under his jurisdiction to implement the same policy.

