



Judicial Process Commission

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SURVEY REVEALS BARRIERS TO SUCCESSFUL EX-OFFENDER RE-ENTRY

6,025 men and women returned to Monroe County from incarceration in 2011. Tens of thousands more in our community have been convicted of a crime in the past. The Judicial Process Commission conducted a survey to analyze what needs ex-offenders had when returning from incarceration and the barriers they faced when trying to achieve their goals of establishing productive, law-abiding lives. Our survey of 80 local ex-offenders revealed that:

- Repercussions of having a criminal record, dictated by both law and social bias, *last a lifetime*
- 33% of respondents have been out of jail or prison for more than 5 years
- *Most pressing concerns when released* from incarceration: finding employment and housing, followed by obtaining health care and identification
- Respondents most *dissatisfied* with probation/parole and employment and housing services
- People were the *most satisfied* with social supports (friends, family, and community groups), identification services, and addiction treatment
- A staggering 59% of respondents were *unemployed, able to work, and looking for work*. This may have some bias since JPC offers services that help increase employability, but the number is nonetheless shocking. The current unemployment rate for the general Rochester area population is 7.4%.
- *Only 25% have been employed full-time at some point since their last release and 16% part-time.*
- Respondents *need most to gain/secure employment*: driver's license, better resume, and computer skills
- By law, employers can *discriminate* based on criminal history only in limited cases (see NY Criminal Law Article 23-A), but many employers simply don't consider applicants with any criminal record.
- Policies *limit or bar employment* and licensure for *anyone* with *any* criminal record in many fields (health care, notary, hair and beauty fields, childcare, teaching, security, social work, and more), until the person is granted a court-issued certificate that verifies rehabilitation, which can take years.
- Many other opportunities are limited by public policy for some ex-offenders, like public housing eligibility, eligibility for student loans, on-campus housing at colleges, and sometimes voting

- A criminal record in New York State must be *carried for life*. Criminal convictions cannot be expunged or sealed, no matter how minor or old the crime may be.
- 56% of respondents *needed to get identification* after release, 57% of whom *couldn't afford* the ID fee
- 80% *qualified as homeless* when released (18% in shelters, 62% staying with friends or family)
- 46% needed to establish *health insurance* after release, with 7.1% needing emergency care
- Average age of respondents: *42 years old*, ranging from 18 to 64 years old
- Criminal justice system disproportionately affects African-Americans (68% of our respondents)
- Nearly half of the respondents were incarcerated as a *direct result* of chemical dependency, and one-third have been diagnosed with a mental illness (1/3 of whom received counseling during incarceration)
- 3 of 4 respondents were last incarcerated for *non-violent, non-sexual crimes*
- It requires the efforts of the *whole community* to successfully re-integrate ex-offenders and give individuals a real chance to “do the right thing.”
- Frustrating self-perpetuating cycles in societal institutions often thwart ex-offenders' goals. Many people stay on public assistance, give up on their goals, or resort back to crime with no other real options. Such cycles trap many ex-offenders in *perpetual, chronic unemployability and extreme poverty*.

The Voices of Re-Entry Project Committee at JPC offers these survey results to the community so that human service agencies, policy-makers, and community members will better understand the needs and reality faced by ex-offenders. We will publish a series of results, including suggestions for simple but powerful changes to policies that could help solve many of these issues. Understanding the barriers that prevent ex-offenders from successful community re-integration and working to reduce those barriers will ultimately improve individual lives, help ensure that those able to work can be considered for employment, reduce dependency on public assistance, and reduce crime in our community.

To read the full report or for further information, please go to www.rocjpc.org.

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