

December 2020

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
President
Senate of Maryland
State House, H-107
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

The Honorable Adrienne Jones
Speaker
Maryland House of Delegates
State House, H-107
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: MSAR 10441 – Effectiveness of the Pilot Program (for Small Business Development by Ex-offenders)

Dear President Ferguson and Speaker Jones,

Pursuant to the requirements of Senate Bill 0582 of the 2015 legislative session, the Maryland Department of Labor (MD Labor), in accordance with § 2–1246 of the State Government Article, submits this report on the Effectiveness of the Pilot Program (for Small Business Development by Ex-offenders) to the Maryland General Assembly. MD Labor, in consultation with the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) and the Maryland Small Business Development Financing Authority, was to establish a program to assist individuals exiting the correctional system by providing:

- i. training in how to establish small businesses; and
- ii. funding to establish small businesses.

This program was subject to available funding, and unfortunately, with none allocated to support the project, the pilot program never launched. MD Labor is eager to explore this opportunity in the future, provided that funds are available. Meanwhile, the Department remains committed to serving returning citizens.

MD Labor’s Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning oversees Correctional Education throughout Maryland’s State correctional facilities. The Office of Correctional Education offers academic, occupational, and transitional programming “behind the fence” to provide inmates with high quality services that facilitate successful transition into Maryland’s workforce and communities.

Correctional Education’s academic programming includes Adult Basic Education, GED® Preparation, Special Education, and English for Speakers of Other Languages. Occupational programs offered are typically 400 to 600 hours in length and facilitate learning through classroom instruction and hands-on practice. Staff train students in in-demand occupations to meet the needs of businesses and employers and to ensure that students are “work-ready” upon release. The transitional program offers 13 courses that equip students with the skills and tools

needed to succeed in their personal and professional life upon returning to their community, some of which align directly with workforce preparation and promote employability post-release.

In order to further support the transition back to the workplace, MD Labor has five Reentry Navigators stationed in various regions of the State. The primary role of the Reentry Navigator is to facilitate connections for returning citizens in their search for employment opportunities. In partnership with the DPSCS, Reentry Navigators visit individuals “behind the fence” and connect with pre-release inmates to ensure they have access to workshops, vital document replacement, workforce training, barrier removal, and more, all of which contributes to their employability.

Returning citizens are connecting with workforce development programs, such as Registered Apprenticeships. The “earn-and-learn” component of apprenticeship programs is revolutionary, especially for a justice-involved population whose recidivism rate depends heavily on an individual’s ability to attain and maintain financial stability. The momentum for Registered Apprenticeship opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals is building. The Department received funding to administer grants over the next three years for the Registered Apprenticeship for Formerly Incarcerated Individuals (Pilot), which awards Registered Apprenticeship Sponsors and employers flexible funding to offset the cost of registering new apprentices that have been formerly incarcerated.

MD Labor continues to seek new and innovative ways to support justice involved individuals as they return to their communities and pursue workforce development opportunities, and ultimately, sustainable and gainful careers. Provided necessary funding, a pilot for small business development by ex-offenders is an initiative the Department would be excited to explore in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tiffany P. Robinson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Tiffany Robinson
Secretary