

SUBSIDIZED JOBS

Youth and adults impacted by the criminal legal system



The public health and economic crises of the past year have exacerbated existing economic inequities. The pandemic has devastated Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color; workers in jobs paying low wages; youth and young adults; women and women of color; and people impacted by the criminal legal system.

[Due to systemic divestment of Black and Brown communities](#) and racist law-and-order policies, people of color have been unjustly targeted by our nation's criminal legal system. Structural barriers—labor market discrimination, arbitrary occupational licensing bans, job prohibitions, obstacles in accessing education, and more—make it difficult for those with a criminal legal record to obtain quality employment and achieve economic security.

Even before the pandemic, the [unemployment rate for formerly incarcerated individuals](#) was over five times the national rate at 27 percent, with a disproportionately higher rate for Black men and Black women at 35.2 and 43.6 percent, respectively. The pandemic has only made this worse. To realize an equitable future, we must ensure youth and adults impacted by the criminal legal system are a target population in job creation and subsidized employment efforts.

CONGRESS MUST ACT

- ▶ Congress must enact an equity-centered national subsidized employment program [in any recovery legislation](#).
- ▶ Congress must prioritize and target investments to youth and adults impacted by the criminal legal system. People with criminal legal histories have received limited support during the pandemic and face continued challenges finding quality employment.
- ▶ Subsidized employment is the only workforce intervention that is [proven](#) to quickly connect people who want to work with employment opportunities. Subsidized employment uses public funds to create jobs for unemployed or underemployed workers through public sector employment or wage subsidies paid to employers. An [equity-centered national subsidized employment program](#) can support an inclusive COVID-19 economic recovery, [increase job quality](#), expand access to [green-economy jobs](#), and lay the groundwork for a more fair, just, and prosperous economy.

WHY NOW?

One in three adults have an arrest or conviction record that creates additional structural barriers too often precluding them from finding quality employment, especially during the pandemic. Furthermore, despite people continuing to return to their communities from incarceration during the pandemic, a [survey from the Council of State Governments](#) recently found that 75 percent of reentry providers had to stop providing services or close entirely during the pandemic. To redress deep-seated inequities and ensure an equitable recovery, we must ensure those impacted by the criminal legal system have access to quality employment during the immediate economic recovery and beyond.

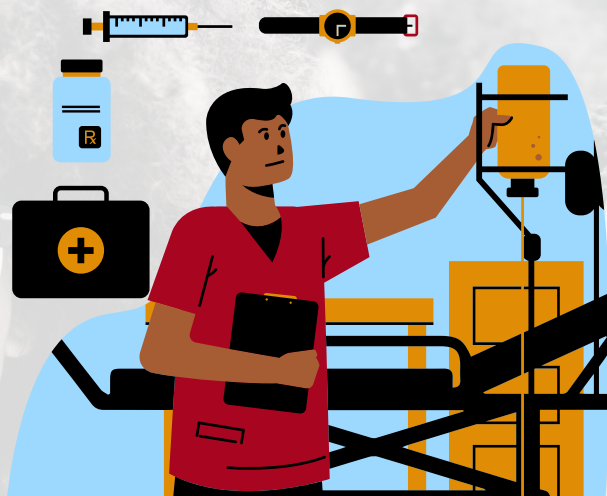
We are in an **all-hands-on-deck** moment in our nation.

WHAT DOES SUBSIDIZED EMPLOYMENT LOOK LIKE?

Subsidized employment connects job seekers to paid opportunities that can support participants to earn credentials and transition to unsubsidized employment. A national subsidized employment program can facilitate access to [a range of work opportunities](#) across the economy, including in the infrastructure sectors that will be central to moving our country toward a [green economy and workforce](#).

Subsidized employment has proven to be an effective strategy for supporting those impacted by the criminal legal system, even during the pandemic. Subsidized employment works best when it is contextualized with education and workforce training opportunities, allowing participants to earn family sustaining wages while building skills and obtaining credentials.

Subsidized employment models that are a part of a career pathway—such as pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships, transitional jobs, and other types of integrated education and training models—can help those with criminal legal histories find meaningful employment and [reduce further contact with the criminal legal system](#). When implemented well, subsidized employment can also drive [job quality and career advancement](#).



WHAT'S THE SCALE OF THE NEED FOR SUBSIDIZED EMPLOYMENT?

Based on our analysis of subsidized-employment implementations, we estimate a per-slot cost of \$17,000 for wage subsidies, training, and robust supportive services for a quality 12-week subsidized employment program. In addition to the millions of individuals with a criminal legal record that severely limits employment opportunities, over [650,000](#) people return to their communities from incarceration each year and could benefit from a targeted subsidized employment initiative. An investment of \$45 billion in federally subsidized employment would serve as a down payment on that need and begin to redress longstanding inequities.

IS SUBSIDIZED EMPLOYMENT POPULAR?

Despite the political division in this country, [93 percent of Americans](#) favor a national initiative that creates paid work and job training opportunities as part of recovery efforts. Since the Great Depression, government has leveraged subsidized employment to help get people to work. Several organizations offering services to people with a criminal legal record offer subsidized employment opportunities. However, in the wake of the pandemic, we need a permanent, national subsidized job investment that provides people impacted by the criminal legal system with equitable access to economic opportunity.




NATIONAL
YOUTH
EMPLOYMENT
COALITION

CLASP
The Center for Law and Social Policy

HEARTLAND
ALLIANCE

SUCCESS STORIES



The THRIVE Fellowship in Louisville, Kentucky was created through a privately funded partnership with Cities United and the Louisville Office for Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods. It is designed for young African American men who are 22 to 26 years old and have misdemeanor convictions resulting from current or previous involvement with the criminal legal system. Participants are awarded a two-year paid fellowship that engages them in civic engagement, leadership development, case management, and workforce training to encourage a generation of public sector leaders who have been impacted by the criminal legal system.



Center for Employment Opportunities provides transitional jobs and workforce training exclusively to over 8,000 individuals returning to their communities from incarceration each year in a dozen states across the country. All participants are on community supervision and face structural barriers resulting from their incarceration. Participants earn wages and industry-recognized credentials and are also connected to public benefit programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program's Employment & Training initiative (SNAP E&T). During the pandemic, CEO has continued to operate and partner with state departments of transportation and other private and public sector employers to provide transitional employment and build employment pipelines.



The Safer Foundation is one of the nation's largest nonprofits working to disrupt the cycle of recidivism and social injustice in our society. Supporting over 5,000 men, women and youth in attaining gainful employment each year, Safer helps people build better lives, stronger families and safer communities. Safer Foundation's Transitional Jobs Program combines time-limited, wage-paid work experience, along with job skills training and supportive services, to help individuals facing barriers gain employment and succeed in the workforce. In 2020, Safer partnered with the Chicago Housing Authority to provide transitional and permanent jobs programming to public housing voucher holders. Participants earned credentials and worked in subsidized and unsubsidized job placements with an average wage of \$13 an hour.