



## JOTF Works

### 2012 GENERAL ASSEMBLY SESSION – JOTF LEGISLATIVE WRAP-UP THREE WINS FOR LOW-WAGE WORKERS

By Melissa Broome

During the 2012 session of the Maryland General Assembly, the Job Opportunities Task Force advocated for legislation to improve the economic opportunities of Maryland's low-skill, low-income workers and their families. Significant progress was made on a variety of JOTF's legislative priorities.

#### Driver's Licensing Requirements for Adults

A bill to reduce barriers to driver's licensing for working adults was signed into law by Governor O'Malley on May 2, 2012. Until now, Maryland was the only state in the nation to require new drivers of all ages to complete the same onerous education and practice requirements, creating tremendous barriers to mobility and employment for low-income adults.

Under the new law, the 60-hour practice rule will be reduced to 14 hours and the time for holding a provisional license will drop from 9 months to 45 days for adults age 25 and older. JOTF thanks Delegate Cheryl Glenn and Senator Jamie Raskin for their sponsorship and dedication to this issue.

#### Transportation Funding for Job Training

As a member of the state's Fair Development Campaign, JOTF was actively engaged in advocating for legislation to require the Maryland Department of Transportation to dedicate one half of one percent of federal transportation funds to workforce training. With the bill's passage, Maryland will become the second state in the nation to permanently commit the 0.5% to job training and to ensure ongoing monitoring of the spending.

Providing training and linking graduates to jobs on major infrastructure projects will strengthen Maryland's commitment to a healthy workforce by creating pathways to employment for disadvantaged, underemployed Marylanders. Passage of this legislation will also allow for the continued support of Project *BuildUP*, a new on-the-job training program that serves workers across the state. JOTF thanks bill sponsors Delegate Carolyn J.B. Howard and Senator Verna Jones-Rodwell for their hard work on this issue.

**In addition to being JOTF priorities, the following bills were supported by the Task Force on Prisoner Reentry. Delegate Jeff Waldstreicher and Senator Verna Jones-Rodwell are the House and Senate Task Force appointees.**

#### Child Support Suspension for Incarcerated Obligor

By working closely with our reentry partners as well as the Department of Human Resources' Child Support Enforcement Administration and the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, JOTF was able to successfully educate policymakers on the importance of suspending child support orders for incarcerated individuals.

Photo: Jay Baker, Governor's Press Office



Supporters join Governor O'Malley on May 2, 2012 as he signs adult driver's licensing reform into law.

The need for this legislation was dire. Under current policy, inmates can often see their debt reach more than \$20,000 before they are released. When the new law takes effect, individuals who are sentenced to at least 18 consecutive months of imprisonment and do not have the financial capacity to pay will have their child support order automatically suspended upon incarceration. To protect the interests of the custodial parent, the Child Support Enforcement Administration will send written notice of the proposed action to the custodial parent and notify them of their right to object. The order will be restored within 60 days of the individual's release.

Passage of this legislation makes Maryland one of a handful of states to enact this type of reentry policy. By preventing the accumulation of uncollectible arrears, those returning to society after incarceration will be more likely to maintain legitimate employment and pay their current child support. JOTF thanks sponsors Delegate Jeff Waldstreicher and Senator Bobby Zirkin for their leadership on this important issue.

#### Ex-Offender Employment – Ban the Box

For the third consecutive year, JOTF helped lead a coalition of advocates in supporting legislation to remove the question from state job applications that asks applicants to check a box indicating if they have ever been convicted of a crime. The removal of this question would enable qualified applicants to get a foot in the door and have a chance to explain their conviction, rather than be automatically disqualified at the outset of the process.

Unlike in years past, there was no opposition to the bill in 2012. The legislation received intense support not only from reentry advocates but also from the Department of Budget and Management and the Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation. Despite passing the Senate Finance Committee with a 9-2 vote that included bi-partisan support, the bill ultimately failed after receiving an unfavorable report from the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Personnel. JOTF thanks bill sponsors Senator Catherine Pugh and Delegate James Proctor for their continued support.

### Criminal Record Shielding – Nonviolent Convictions

More than one in four U.S. adults – roughly 65 million people – have an arrest or conviction that shows up in routine criminal background checks. This means that nearly 1.5 million Marylanders with criminal records face unprecedented barriers to employment. With the rapidly expanding use of background checks, employers are routinely excluding all job applicants who have criminal records from consideration, no matter how minor or dated their offenses.

Research shows that recidivism risks are highest in the first 3-5 years following incarceration. In an effort to increase employment opportunities for people with criminal records while at the same time preserving public safety, the proposed legislation would have shielded nonviolent felony convictions after a five-year waiting period and nonviolent misdemeanors after three years. The shielded information would still be fully available to law enforcement. Despite much support from the reentry community, the bill failed after receiving an unfavorable report from the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee. JOTF thanks bill sponsors Delegate Jeff Waldstreicher and Senator Verna Jones-Rodwell.

### Diminution Credits – Educational Achievement

JOTF worked with numerous reentry partners to support legislation that would have established a 60-day diminution credit bonus for inmates who attain a GED or educational certificate behind the fence. Education behind bars, specifically obtaining one's GED, is associated with higher rates of employment after release. Studies have shown that inmates who have a GED when released from prison recidivate at a rate that is 7.9% less than inmates overall, meaning fewer victims and more productive members of the community.

Encouraging inmates to not only participate but complete an educational program is a matter of public safety – replacing criminal behavior with an educational foundation to build confidence and secure legitimate job skills. After contentious floor debate, the bill passed the House but ultimately failed after receiving an unfavorable report from the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee. JOTF thanks sponsor Delegate Jeff Waldstreicher for his support of this issue.

*For more information on JOTF's advocacy work, visit [www.jotf.org](http://www.jotf.org) or contact Melissa Broome at [Melissa@jotf.org](mailto:Melissa@jotf.org) or (410) 234-8046.*

---

## MARYLAND EXPANDS ACCESS TO TRAINING: NEW BUILDUP PROGRAM WILL HELP WORKERS ACCESS TRANSPORTATION JOBS

By Andrea Roethke

This March, the State Highway Administration (SHA) welcomed the first class of students to *BuildUP* – a new on-the-job training program for transportation-related jobs. Maryland Department of Transportation Secretary Beverley Swaim-Staley initially announced the creation of the program in December 2011. Since then, SHA has been working with stakeholders to build a training plan and recruit participants. In a press release about the program, Swaim-Staley explained: "The *BuildUP* program invests in people and provides them with essential job skills to be competitive in today's market. This program is a win-win initiative because it provides our transportation field with qualified, skilled individuals while creating and saving jobs for our families."

*BuildUP* is designed to provide technical and skilled craft training related to the transportation and highway construction industries. The program will offer four core training tracks: a basic carpentry program; a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) B course; entry-level career training in AutoCADD (Computer Aided Drafting and Design); and Microstation training. SHA is partnering with local community colleges to provide the training. SHA will also seek partnerships with local unions and non-profit organizations to expand and deliver various training components. Spring classes are being offered at Anne Arundel Community College (CADD), the Community College of Baltimore County (CADD, CDL, Microstation and Carpentry), and Prince George's Community College (CDL, Carpentry and AutoCADD).

*BuildUP* targets unemployed and disadvantaged workers for training. To help trainees succeed in the program, *BuildUP* pays a stipend of \$7.25 for each hour of training completed and helps participants overcome transportation barriers. Each trainee is eligible to receive a bus pass, and has the option to ride a free chartered shuttle from SHA headquarters to the training sites. After completing the program, graduates will attend a job fair where potential employers and SHA contractors will be invited to meet and screen candidates for employment.

SHA has received an overwhelming response from interested applicants – over 1,300 applied to fill approximately 150 targeted slots for the program. Job seekers from all corners of the state applied, with the highest concentrations from Baltimore City and Baltimore, Prince George's, Montgomery and Anne Arundel counties. While nearly 25 percent of applicants were newly unemployed in the last six months, 15 percent had been unemployed for more than two years. Despite the ongoing economic recovery, there is still a great need for workforce training to help displaced workers learn marketable skills.

In response to the clear need for services among Maryland job seekers, SHA partnered with the state Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation (DLLR) to hold a resource fair for applicants who were not accepted into the first round of *BuildUP*. At the event, job seekers were able to connect to a variety of resources to help in their job search, including other training alternatives, community resources, services for people with criminal records, drug treatment programs, information on upcoming job fairs, and more. DLLR also partnered with SHA upfront to assist with the candidate screening and assessment process.

SHA plans to expand *BuildUP* to other parts of the state for future classes. They are currently in the process of developing training to be offered on the Eastern Shore, and in southern and western Maryland. They hope to have plans finalized in time to open a second round of applications later in 2012.

The program leverages federal funds to create new pathways into transportation-related jobs. *BuildUP* was launched after JOTF and its partners in the Fair Development Campaign raised awareness of a federal provision that allows states to use up to 0.5% of their surface transportation and bridge funds for training. The provision is part of an equal employment opportunity law, and it authorizes programs that help close employment gaps in an industry where socially and economically disadvantaged, minority, and women workers are often underrepresented. Maryland joins a number of other states – Wisconsin, Missouri, Michigan, New Jersey and Minnesota – in taking advantage of this provision.

Thanks to legislation passed during the 2012 legislative session, the *BuildUP* program has a promising future. As described in this newsletter's policy wrap-up, the General Assembly passed a bill permanently committing 0.5% of the state's federal surface transportation and bridge funds to workforce development. For 2012, this amounted to about one million in training dollars. JOTF and its partners in the Fair Development Campaign first pushed for introduction of the legislation in 2011, but the bill died and had to be re-introduced in 2012. The legislation approved this year not only commits ongoing funding to training, but also ensures coordination with the Governor's Workforce Investment Board and requires annual public reporting on the program's activities and outcomes.

*For more information on **BuildUP**, visit the Office of Equal Opportunity page of the SHA website at [roads.maryland.gov](http://roads.maryland.gov).*

# REENTRY LOBBY DAY IN ANNAPOLIS – Rally for Second Chances

By Caryn York

On March 1, 2012, hundreds of Marylanders gathered at the state capital to advocate for policies that reduce barriers to employment for people with criminal records. Buses from Prince George's County, Baltimore County, Southern Maryland and Baltimore City brought hundreds of individuals to Annapolis to urge Maryland's lawmakers to listen to their story.

**I'M FOR  
SECOND  
CHANCES**

The daylong event began with participants marching from the Stanton Community Center to Lawyers' Mall in front of the State House to host the "Rally for Second Chances!" Armed with bright yellow buttons that spoke to the day's theme, "I'm for Second Chances", and blessed with beautiful, warm weather, participants stood in front of the Thurgood Marshall statue

on the Mall to call attention to policies and practices that render a significant population effectively unemployable. Participants urged lawmakers to "Ban the Box", which would remove the question from state job applications that asks applicants to check a box if they have ever been convicted of a crime.

Speakers included supportive legislators such as Senator Anthony Muse (D-Prince George's County) and Senator Jamie Raskin (D-Montgomery County), reentry advocates from Healthcare for the Homeless, JOTF staff, and representatives from Mission of Love Charities and The New Revival Center for Renewal in Prince George's County. In addition, poetic and musical acts rallied participants to action by calling on our state's leaders to support initiatives that remove barriers to successful reentry after incarceration.

After the rally, supporters split into groups to visit with legislators who were members of the committees that would hear this year's reentry bills, including the Senate Finance and Judicial Proceedings committees and the House Judiciary and Appropriations committees. Participants with a criminal record shared their stories about how it feels to be consistently denied employment because of their past, and how it impacts their ability to get back on their feet. They described why it is important for policymakers to support initiatives that would allow them the same employment and housing opportunities as those without a criminal record.



Residents and advocates from around the state gather on Lawyers' Mall to rally for second chances.

While some groups visited legislators, others headed back to the Stanton Community Center to participate in informative workshops. Individuals received information regarding access to services for low-wage Marylanders, the legislative process, and reentry organizing. There was also an opportunity for participants to convey their personal stories on film, sharing how having a criminal record has presented significant barriers to obtaining employment, housing, and many public services.

After lunch, participants headed over to the House Judiciary and Senate Judicial Proceedings committees to attend bill hearings. Supporters filled the hearing rooms and many testified on the three bills being heard. One bill would have provided a 60-day diminution credit for inmates who complete their GED or vocational certification, and another sought to shield nonviolent convictions from the public after a specified time. The third bill, which ultimately passed, will prevent the accumulation of un-payable debt by suspending child support orders for certain obligors incarcerated 18 months or more.

Unfortunately, more than one in four Americans – 65 million people – have an arrest or conviction record and Maryland statistics are consistent with the national data. With current employment screening policies in place, this leaves a significant segment of the population largely shut out of the job market, when they are most desperate to get back on their feet. Next year, we will be back in Annapolis urging our lawmakers to hear us and reverse the policies and practices that prevent individuals with a criminal record from reentering society and the mainstream economy. Next year, we will be louder. And greater in numbers.

## Job Opportunities Task Force

111 Water Street  
Suite 201  
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

*Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes*

# STAY CONNECTED WITH JOTF!

YOU CAN NOW KEEP IN TOUCH WITH US YEAR ROUND ON FACEBOOK AND TWITTER. VISIT US ONLINE TO KEEP TABS ON THE LATEST JOTF NEWS AND EVENTS:



Become a fan on **Facebook!** Find us at [www.facebook.com/jotfmaryland](http://www.facebook.com/jotfmaryland)



Follow us on **Twitter!** Find us at [www.twitter.com/jotfmaryland](http://www.twitter.com/jotfmaryland)



Coming soon! Stay tuned for the launch of our new **blog** at [www.jotf.org](http://www.jotf.org)!

JOTF is a 501c(3) non-profit organization. If you would like to support our efforts to help low-income workers and job seekers please contact [jessica@jotf.org](mailto:jessica@jotf.org) or call **410-234-8040**.

## Meet Our Board and Staff:

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Melanie Styles, President**  
Abell Foundation

**Deborah Eisenberg, Vice President**  
University of Maryland School of Law

**Kevin Jordan, Treasurer**  
Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)

**Avis Ransom, Secretary**  
Morgan State University

**Katharine Caldwell**  
Baltimore Symphony Orchestra

**Patrice Cromwell**  
Annie E. Casey Foundation

**Jason Frank, Esq**  
Frank, Frank & Scherr, LLC

**Tomi Hiers**  
Maryland Department of Human Resources

**Darryn Jones**  
i21 Strategies LLC

**David Kandel**  
The Algebra Project

**Jean Lewis**  
Kramon & Graham, P.A.

**Joanne Nathans**  
JOTF Founding President

**Michael Pinard**  
University of Maryland School of Law

**Marion Pines**  
JHU Institute for Policy Studies

**Martine Prevost-Charles**  
Gross, Mendelsohn & Associates, PA

### STAFF

**Jason Perkins-Cohen**, Executive Director

**Melissa Broome**, Senior Policy Advocate

**Andrea Roethke**, Senior Policy Analyst

**Matt Stubbs**, Program Manager

**Jessica Traskey**, Finance & Grants Manager

**Caryn York**, Policy Associate