



**Advocating for the Successful Reentry of Individuals with Criminal Records:
Lessons Learned from Maryland**

November 2013

Prepared by the Job Opportunities Task Force for the Annie E. Casey Foundation

Acknowledgements

This paper was funded by the generous support of Annie E. Casey Foundation. The findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of the author(s) alone, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the foundation. The policy proposals described in this paper were developed and supported by a large number of organizations throughout Maryland. The list of supporters is too long to list in this paper but their contributions have not gone unnoticed. In addition to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, we are also fortunate to have had the support of many local and national funders including the Abell Foundation, The Fund for Change, and the Open Society Institute.

The Job Opportunities Task Force

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Introduction

People with criminal records face countless obstacles when attempting to move beyond their criminal histories, the most significant of which is often employment. Policies and practices created to maintain public safety produce unintended consequences that generate significant barriers to the successful transition from incarceration to the open society. These barriers, commonly known as collateral consequences, severely limit a returning citizen's ability to legally support themselves and their family.

The Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) has made a significant effort over the past decade to reduce the collateral consequences of a criminal record, with a particular focus on policy change. We learned many lessons along the way about the most effective advocacy strategies. This paper shares those lessons with a wider community of advocates in hope that organizations in other states can engage in this work with a set of best practices in their toolbox.

The Context

Every year roughly 13,000 people exit Maryland state prisons, and more than half return to Baltimore City, concentrated in a few zip codes in distinct areas of east and west Baltimore. These communities are usually poor and racially segregated, void of access and opportunity. This, in turn, leads to high recidivism rates. In specific areas of the city more than two-thirds of those released from incarceration return to prison.

As advances in technology make criminal background checks easier than ever to perform, increased numbers of people with criminal backgrounds are finding themselves shut out of the mainstream economy. Employers are reluctant to hire people with criminal records and are routinely excluding job applicants who have criminal records from consideration, no matter how minor or dated their offenses. As a result, many with conviction histories apply for jobs for which they are well qualified, but are not even considered because of their past. Without access to stable employment opportunities, these individuals will continue to face insurmountable barriers to successful reentry. Given that more than 90 percent of

employers report using criminal background checks in hiring¹ - and more than 60 percent of employers report that they would "probably not" or "definitely not" be willing to hire an applicant with a criminal record² – a prior conviction of any kind becomes a major barrier to accessing the very tool needed to facilitate a successful transition back to society – a job.

Our Approach

JOTF is a nonprofit organization focused on improving skills and job opportunities for low-income workers and job seekers. Through advocacy, research and training, JOTF works to help Marylanders emerge from poverty via improved working conditions, expanded employment opportunities and statewide system-level reforms.

Throughout its history, JOTF has focused on low-wage, low-skill employment, the insufficient number of jobs that pay family-supporting wages, and the impact these issues have on economic development. The organization brings together employers, workers, job seekers, educators, trainers, service providers, public administrators and policy makers to identify what works, what needs to be changed, and how to improve outcomes.

More specifically, in recent years, JOTF has worked to reduce employment barriers for people with criminal records. Throughout this paper, we will highlight some of our key policy initiatives. Major victories include the automatic expungement of arrests without charge, the expungement of nuisance crimes, child support reform, and a statewide “Ban the Box” policy. Our ongoing work is focused on shielding non-violent misdemeanors from the public view. These initiatives are referenced throughout the paper, and the appendix provides a detailed summary.

A. Setting the Agenda

Before launching a comprehensive criminal justice reform campaign, it is important to set a policy agenda that is ambitious, yet achievable. To do this, advocates must take stock of existing reform efforts, consider easily attained legislative victories, and decide which reforms are worth pursuing.

¹Society for Human Resources Management, “Background Checking: Conducting Criminal Background Checks” (January 22, 2010).

²Harry Holzer, Steven Raphael, Michael Stoll, “Perceived Criminality, Criminal Background Checks and the Racial Hiring Practices of Employers,” (April 2005), at page 3.

There is merit to both the “low-hanging fruit” and “going bold” methods discussed in this section. Advocating for noncontroversial initiatives can mean policy advances in your state’s legislature that excite your base of supporters and grow your coalition as other organizations recognize your success. Similarly, chasing and securing wins for contentious policies can bring significant notoriety and authority, although these victories often take significant labor and time to achieve.

When planning your legislative agenda, it is best to juxtapose these tactics against the capacity of your organization to lead a criminal justice reform campaign. Remember to consider the size of your staff, the political climate of your state and the scope of impact your reforms could have. Perhaps you will pick a handful of accessible policy measures to get a foothold on the issues, or maybe your state is ready for a bold move and it’s time to get started on one of the more demanding initiatives in your policy agenda.

A1. Low Hanging Fruit

One strategy to achieve policy change is to initiate a modest legislative proposal with the hope that it passes quickly. Success will rally a coalition, add to an organization's credibility, and lay the groundwork for future achievements. A low-hanging fruit proposal is less controversial, has little or no fiscal impact, and is relatively straightforward. This does not mean the policy is unimportant or that it does not help many people. It may help fewer people than a bolder strategy, but it should also lay a foundation for future efforts that will be even more impactful.

JOTF used this strategy to pass its "nuisance crimes" bill in 2008. We had long been concerned about the impact of a criminal background on employment and housing and had tried unsuccessfully to limit public access to these records. While non-convictions can be removed from the public record in Maryland, convictions – until now - stayed on the record forever, unless the governor issued a rare pardon. Proposals that are more ambitious gained little traction in Maryland's General Assembly as legislators refused to eliminate conviction records.

JOTF staff determined that to change access to criminal records, we had to first demonstrate that it could be accomplished on a small scale with little difficulty or risk. Against this backdrop we initiated legislation to expunge nuisance crime convictions, such as panhandling, loitering and public urination. These are minor crimes more closely associated with poverty than drugs or violence. The limited impact of these crimes helped lawmakers understand the need to treat crimes and their subsequent records based on the severity, making it very difficult for opponents to make a strong case against the bill. We fully

understood the bill would have only a modest impact on the lives of most Marylanders, but that it was critical to shatter the idea that convictions must forever be part of the public record.

As with most low-hanging fruit legislation, it was challenging to get other advocates or legislators actively engaged in the effort. In and of itself, the bill was not was not sweeping enough to build much excitement. By clarifying the long-term objective, however, JOTF built a coalition of support.

The bill passed with little fanfare and some people have gone on to expunge nuisance crimes from their record. The lack of controversy since the law's implementation has changed the discussion about limiting access to criminal records. The smooth implementation of this law has opened the door to discussions about expungement of other crimes, which have a more lasting impact on a person's ability to engage in the workforce.

A2. Going Bold

Using this strategy, an advocate pursues legislation that will make a significant impact with lower expectations for the bill's immediate chance of success. This strategy communicates an organization's values or the need for a major change in law. Oftentimes a bold policy change requires a multi-year strategy. This likely involves allocating time to educate lawmakers, building a base of support that can be mobilized, and subsequently overcoming traditional obstacles of a more ambitious policy.

Going bold is likely to energize a coalition, capture media attention and generate a passionate response from lawmakers and the public. This strategy also offers room to compromise as criminal justice reforms rarely pass without amendments. "Going bold" allows an advocate to accept amendments and still pass important legislation.

Overextending and going too bold can present its own risks including alienating moderates and losing the attention of policymakers. The media may also dismiss the issue if it seems too far-fetched, and advocates often lose the opportunity to amend over-the-top proposals because they are quickly rejected.

JOTF used this strategy to advance its criminal records shielding proposal. After passing nuisance crime expungement legislation in 2008, Maryland advocates were ready to go bold. During the 2012 legislative session, JOTF and other organizations supported legislation to establish the automatic shielding of nonviolent misdemeanor and felony convictions after three and five-year waiting periods, respectively. Coalition members came out in strong support and the effort became the focus of a Reentry

Lobby Day that culminated at the legislative hearing. In addition to the anticipated concerns raised by legislators, there was strong opposition from unexpected sources. Officials in the state court system had reservations about the automatic nature of the bill, and domestic violence prevention advocates worried convictions connected to sex crimes could be shielded inappropriately.

The bill could not pass as drafted, but it garnered significant attention and support from legislators and other advocates. The resulting public discussion allowed the coalition to better understand the opposition and develop a proposal that would address many of their concerns. The process will ultimately create a stronger, more viable bill to rally around going forward.

Creating a legislative strategy requires careful consideration and balance between chasing low-hanging fruit and going bold. Neither technique is applicable to all legislative endeavors, and any strategy should always depend on specific policies and the environment in which they are considered. We cannot know what might have happened in Maryland had we adopted a different approach to criminal records shielding, but we are confident that our strategy of reversing the belief that convictions must always remain in the public realm before aiming for more comprehensive reforms will ultimately bear fruit.

B. Coalition Building

No matter how strong the entity, it is nearly impossible for one organization to make a significant change in state policy on its own. Rather, geographically diverse coalitions or those that add a different constituent base on an issue are best suited to influence state legislators to support policy change. By definition, coalitions mean that more organizations and more people are available to support a cause. These additional resources can make a meaningful difference to a policy's chances of success.

There is no perfect way to form a coalition and JOTF has used different methods in the past. Sometimes our initiatives start with research that indicates a need for policy change and recommends a particular course of action. We have also brought together groups of advocates for a general discussion of the issues and potential remedies. However, as any coalition gets going, it is important to make the best use of members' knowledge, relationships and expertise. For example, without a lawyer on staff, JOTF has used the legal community to help with drafting model legislation and answer committee members' legal questions. Another strategy involves asking coalition partners to meet with legislators in specific districts or with whom they have a strong relationship.

B1. Unifying your coalition

Keeping all the members of a coalition on the same page can be difficult. JOTF experienced the highs and lows of coalition building in its effort to expunge arrests without charges.

In 2006, largely driven by changes in police practices, many Maryland residents were arrested but released without charges, let alone a conviction. In Baltimore City alone, reports indicated the policy affected as many as 1,600 people a month.

Media attention around the issue had residents, advocates, and legislators upset and ready to take action. However, advocates who traditionally work on these issues were not organized and each went forward with its own legislative solution. Legislators and advocates became entrenched in supporting their own strategies at the expense of the other alternatives. The lack of coordination and confusion about the various bills made it easy for opponents to discredit the movement and no expungement legislation passed that year.

JOTF and other advocates recognized the lack of coordination and agreed on a set of principles that formed the foundation for a bill the full group supported. Advocates supported only one bill that expunged arrests without charge. Their unity and strength as a group overcame the opposition and the bill passed the following year.

B2. Unlikely Allies

Members of a coalition can often be homogeneous – similar in mission and constituencies. Likeminded groups are easy to organize and likely to agree on the principles of a legislative proposal. At the same time, these organizations may be repetitive in their arguments and relationships with policymakers. Sometimes an unlikely ally may be the most effective coalition partner. They provide a point of view that traditional coalition members do not offer and may capture the attention of legislators and the media.

Forming an alliance with an unlikely ally is very different than doing so with a traditional partner. An organization that typically supports reentry issues likely trusts your organization, generally wants to support policies that help those with a criminal background and only needs to know that the proposal will make a significant impact. As described below, the unlikely ally, however, does not usually support reentry bills and instead needs to be convinced that the policy will do no harm.

JOTF works to identify and recruit coalition members beyond the “usual suspects” and found this particularly helpful in advancing our criminal records shielding bill in 2012. Previous proposals to expunge or shield convictions, and even non-convictions, from the public record have always faced fierce opposition from the Maryland State’s Attorneys’ Association. They contend that limiting access to a criminal record compromises public safety. While we were able to demonstrate evidence to the contrary, especially given the mild offenses under consideration, the opposition of a powerful and well-respected agency weighed heavily on lawmakers. As much as advocates like JOTF tried to assure legislators that there was little danger in the proposals, the MSAA’s disapproval continued to damage shielding legislation prospects. To move forward, JOTF found law enforcement representatives to counter the fears instilled by the MSAA. We initiated meetings with local state’s attorneys and found several prominent leaders to support the bill and coalition as a means of reducing recidivism through access to employment. This public showing of unlikely support improved lawmakers’ perception of the bill and set the stage for productive negotiations and its eventual passage.

C. Messaging

Selecting a message that unifies a coalition and becomes the key talking point of a campaign is critical to passing criminal justice reforms. There are infinite ways to structure your message, but the most successful campaigns usually focus on state and individual economics, equity and justice.

C1. State Fiscal Impact

Many states remain in fiscal crisis and proposals that increase revenue or reduce expenditures are likely to capture the attention of the administration and legislators.

Like many states, Maryland opted to ban SNAP benefits (food stamps) for single people and non-custodial parents with drug convictions. Previous attempts to change this policy based on the need for food assistance were ineffective, but the governor’s office became interested when JOTF, in 2005, explained that lifting the ban would make Maryland eligible for millions of dollars in Food Stamps Employment and Training program funds.

JOTF had a similar experience in 2007 when developing a policy to eliminate state-owed child support debt of noncustodial parents. The state agency was lukewarm on the issue when we focused on the importance of financial assistance. However, when we changed our messaging to highlight the fact that

lowering the state's \$1 billion in uncollected child support might make Maryland eligible for federal incentive funds, officials came to the table as a partner and actively supported the policy.

C2. Racial Messaging

The disproportionate impact of criminal records on employment prospects for African Americans is well known. Depending on the political dynamics in your state, raising the issue can either distract from the proposal or energize the coalition and focus attention on those most impacted. When it comes to advocacy efforts, particularly in criminal justice reform, advocates struggle with how to balance messages centered on employability and racial justice.

In the case of our criminal records shielding legislation, race became one of our strongest arguments. In Maryland, African Americans represent 29 percent of the population, yet make up 72 percent of the prison population.³ Given recent national discussions on mass incarceration and its impact on African American communities, we have an opportunity to explore leveling the playing field for African American, and typically male, jobseekers with a criminal background. During the 2013 legislative session, Maryland's Legislative Black Caucus became a critical player in our advocacy efforts as they took on the shielding legislation as one of their top priorities. While the bill failed in the last minutes of the session, the support of the Black Caucus highlighted the unbalanced impact a criminal background can have on employment outcomes for people of color, and set the stage for wide support of a future attempt to pass the legislation.

D. Leadership

Ultimately, leadership must be on your side. This includes key legislative players, the state's executive team, and decision-makers within relevant agencies. A bill cannot become law without it passing through the legislature and getting the Governor's signature. Having the support of the relevant state agency that will oversee the policy change and/or be responsible for overseeing the program also makes the path to passage a lot easier.

Given this reality, everyone wants leadership to support their bill. The question is how to obtain this support. The topics described throughout this paper will increase the likelihood of obtaining leadership's

³ Maryland Division of Correction. (2010). Annual Report Fiscal Year 2010. Retrieved from: <http://www.dpscs.state.md.us/publicinfo/publications/pdfs/DOC2010AnnualRpt.pdf>

support. For example, developing a strong coalition will raise the profile of the issue and encourage leadership to support the policy.

But there are other ways to engage leadership. Over the years, JOTF has found success through its general approach to public policy. We maintain a strong presence in the state capital and take positions on numerous bills. This helps raise our profile with legislators and allows us to develop a relationship with members of the General Assembly. We also work with state agencies when appropriate, whether by sitting on committees or working with staff to improve service delivery. For example, JOTF has helped to develop marketing materials for the Child Support Payment Incentive Program and the exemption form for parole fees.

Establishing a positive relationship with the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) ultimately helped pass critical legislation. Members of the coalition raised concerns that those leaving incarceration were doing so without any sort of government recognized identification. The state responded to our concerns by sending a bus to visit certain institutions and allowing inmates whose release was forthcoming to apply for and receive an ID. This solution was inadequate. The maximum number of people served per year was 1,800, a relatively small proportion of the 13,000 released annually.

While there was initial reticence to change the program and help more people, our existing relationship with the administration eventually encouraged DPSCS and the Motor Vehicle Administration to support legislation that would help all returning citizens. A new law passed in 2009 now requires the departments to issue a secondary identification that can be used to apply for official state identification with the MVA free of charge.

The law would have been extremely difficult to pass without the support of the key agencies, and we never would have received that support had we been overtly critical of their initial effort to address the situation. Instead we demonstrated the additional need and found a solution that would help all returning citizens without significant administrative burden or cost to the state.

E. Opposition

Unfortunately, initiatives that promote criminal justice reform often encounter staunch opponents. It is important to identify the likely sources of opposition and prepare counter arguments that will hopefully

reassure legislators to vote for the policy under consideration. Advocates must accurately assess the strength and sway of their opposition and realistically compare it to that of their own coalition. This is sometimes referred to as Power Mapping and it provides a framework to develop a strategy to pass the bill and considerations for negotiating areas of compromise, if necessary.

JOTF's general approach is to work with the opposition when possible. We have found that legislators look favorably on initiatives when the participants cooperate with one another, negotiate fairly, and make compromises when appropriate. The challenge is to know when compromise is necessary and how to find a middle ground that retains the most important aspects of the proposal.

One example of this is our work to limit public access to criminal records. Two groups opposed our efforts but our reaction to them was different. Domestic violence and sexual assault prevention advocates raised concerns over these proposals. For example, they found examples of convictions, which required registration as a "sex offender" which the proposed bill could shield – an obvious problem. We modified our legislation to ensure such offenses could not be shielded.

We took a very different approach with the Maryland State's Attorney Association, who also opposed our bill. In this case, we believed the Association had a broader philosophical opposition to the bill, rather than a desire to protect a particular vulnerable population. Brief attempts at negotiation indicated that any "compromise" would destroy the merits of the bill. In this case, our tactic was to find State's Attorneys from individual counties to counteract that argument and demonstrate a difference of opinion within the field. Though the bill did not pass, the lack of a unified opposition was a key reason legislative committees in both chambers supported the shielding bill in 2013.

F. Directly Affected Individuals

A good advocate can make a strong case for policy change, but directly affected individuals can be even more powerful. They can provide first-hand experience that describes the depths of the problem and the promise of the solution offered. While analytics and research are certainly important, the power of a personal story sometimes more effectively generates attention and secures votes.

The most effective testimony comes from those directly impacted by proposed legislation. It is also important how these personal stories are representative larger populations. Such was the case in Maryland's effort to "Ban the Box." This legislation sought to eliminate the box on state job applications

that requires the applicant to check if they have been convicted of a crime. The bill did not have much traction in the first two years it was introduced.

Momentum changed dramatically in year two during a hearing in the Senate Finance Committee. More than 100 people with criminal records packed the room and delivered impassioned testimony that clearly moved key members of the committee. Legislators who previously seemed cold to the idea, offered sympathetic comments and challenged the opposition to explain why removing a box was such a big deal for them. After the remarkable turnout at the hearing, state officials also changed their tune and sought to reach compromise. While the legislation failed due to other complications that year, they acted administratively to remove the question from their job application and supported legislation the following year to codify the practice into law.

G. Compromise

Even with a good strategy and a strong coalition, compromise is sometimes the only way forward. Ideally, it is best to know your bottom line before introducing a bill. However, circumstances may change during the legislative period that may make you feel more or less confident in the proposal's short-term, or even long-term prospects. Advocates must constantly and realistically evaluate a bill's prospects. The key is not only to know what provisions you would be willing to compromise on, but also the best time for negotiations.

G1. When to Compromise?

The short answer to this question is that an advocate should pursue compromise when it becomes clear that the legislation cannot pass "as is," but an amended version can be approved. JOTF faced this situation in 2010 with its bill to improve the parole fee exemption process. In Maryland, people released from parole are charged a monthly fee of \$40. Of course, most people released from prison do not have employment immediately and do not have the money to pay the fee. Failure to pay can lead to a surcharge, driver's license suspension and even incarceration. Technically, an exemption from the fee has always been available, but those released were not routinely informed of this. Even if they were informed, they would still have to go before the Parole Commission, which does not always act promptly.

Eliminating the fee altogether was our preference, but the loss of revenue during difficult fiscal times made this impractical. JOTF set about improving the exemption process. Initially, our goal was to

transfer the authority to grant fee exemptions to the Department of Parole and Probation, whose agents meet regularly with parolees and are best poised to know whether individuals may qualify for an exemption. Though many legislators were sympathetic, the bill failed when the parole officers union opposed the legislation, citing heavy caseloads and an inability to take on the added responsibility.

JOTF did not believe it could pass the bill in the foreseeable future due to the union's opposition and did not think they would change their position any time soon. We recognized that the goal of the bill was to keep individuals from incurring debt from parole fees and that this could be accomplished in other ways. We worked with union officials to develop language that all parties would support in 2011. Under the new law, the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, in conjunction with the local detention centers, ensured that the exemption process is explained orally and in writing to parolees. This compromise ultimately led to the bill's passage and ensured that parolees have appropriate access to the exemption process.

In some instances, when we opted for a compromise, it was with the understanding that we would pursue more expansive legislation in the future. This was the case when we pursued the nuisance crimes legislation. And just a few years later we again sought to limit public access to criminal records with our shielding legislation. In the parole fee legislation described above, it was our hope and expectation that the bill would sufficiently protect parolees.

H. Implementation

Congratulations! You have built a strong coalition, set a clear agenda, secured the support of likely and unlikely allies, and created a working relationship with the opposition and your state's leadership to move your policy initiative forward. Your proposal passed. Don't make the mistake of many advocates and move onto your next bill without first making certain that the law you worked so hard to pass is implemented appropriately.

It is important to revisit past victories, analyze whether they have been effective, and make adjustments either administratively or through legislative action. JOTF is in the process of working through some of these challenges at the time of the publication of this paper. In 2007, JOTF supported legislation to create the Child Support Payment Incentive Program, an effort to eliminate all state-owed arrears if noncustodial parents made consistent child support payments for two consecutive years. The agency supported the bill and Maryland became one of the first states in the nation to adopt a statewide debt-leveraging program. While the legislation was a success, there were significant hiccups in its implementation. The biggest

challenge has been that enrollment has remained low. Fortunately, the agency has been receptive and partnered with several community groups to spread the word about the program. Participation has increased significantly, and JOTF and other members of the coalition are in discussions with Maryland's Child Support Enforcement Administration to modify existing enforcement policies and encourage engagement and participation of noncustodial parents.

Conclusion

People leaving incarceration face many barriers to successful reentry. Many of these barriers require a policy solution. Pushing for a change in law is challenging under any circumstances, but it can be particularly difficult when advocating on behalf of those with a criminal background. Typically, legislators have not been sympathetic for fear they will be cast as soft on crime.

But the tide may be changing. There seems to be a growing sense among many Democrats and Republicans in Maryland that long sentences for more minor crimes are not appropriate and not fiscally feasible. And to keep the prison population low, opportunities need to be created for those leaving incarceration. The time may be now to remove long-standing barriers and open possibilities for a better life. We hope this paper can provide concrete guidance for advocates to make advances and we hope that other states will share their success and the strategies that led to it.

Appendix: Synopsis of Policy Reforms

The following is a summary of the criminal justice and reentry initiatives discussed in this report. Each relates to increasing employment opportunities for people with criminal records. For more information on JOTF's policy portfolio, visit www.jotf.org.

Public Assistance - Eligibility for Residents Convicted of a Felony Involving a Controlled Dangerous Substance (2005)

This law allows Maryland to opt out of the federal ban on food stamps for single individuals and non-custodial parents with drug convictions. This law made Maryland eligible for additional federal funding under the Food Stamps Employment and Training Program.

<http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/webmga/frmMain.aspx?ys=2005rs/billfile/hb1024.htm>

Criminal Procedure - Expungement of Police Records – Arrest Without Charge – Automatic (2007)

In Baltimore City alone 1,600 people were arrested and released each month without ever being charged. This law automatically expunges an arrest without charge from public record anywhere in Maryland.

<http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/webmga/frmMain.aspx?tab=subject3&ys=2007rs/billfile/hb0010.htm>

Child Support Enforcement - Child Support Incentive Program (2007)

Many low-wage, non-custodial parents accumulate child support debt to the State during periods of incarceration. This debt discourages previously incarcerated people from working in the mainstream economy where wages are garnished to remediate this debt. This law establishes the Child Support Payment Incentive Program and eliminates debt owed to the state by noncustodial parents if they pay their full child support to their children. With this law, Maryland became one of the first to create a statewide debt-leveraging program.

<http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/webmga/frmMain.aspx?tab=subject3&ys=2007rs/billfile/hb0263.htm>

Police and Court Records - Nuisance Crimes – Expungement (2008)

This law allows for the expungement of certain nuisance crime convictions. Eligible crimes include panhandling or soliciting money, drinking an alcoholic beverage in public, obstructing the free passage of another in a public place; sleeping on or in park structures, loitering and vagrancy.

<http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/webmga/frmMain.aspx?tab=subject3&ys=2008rs/billfile/hb0685.htm>

Correctional Facilities - Released Inmates - Identification Cards (2009)

JOTF worked with a coalition of advocates, the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, and the Motor Vehicle Administration to pass legislation requiring inmates be released with a form of secondary identification. The ID must comply with requirements for secondary identification for obtaining a Maryland identification card issued by the MVA. This important law facilitates the process of inmates applying for state-issued identification upon their release from incarceration.

<http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/webmga/frmMain.aspx?tab=subject3&ys=2009rs/billfile/sb0186.htm>

Criminal Procedure - Occupational Licenses or Certificates - Criminal Conviction (2009)

This law prohibits the denial of an occupational license based solely on a conviction for a nonviolent offense. Instead, licensing bodies are now required to consider whether a direct relationship exists between the conviction and the occupational license sought.

<http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/webmga/frmMain.aspx?tab=subject3&ys=2009rs/billfile/hb0635.htm>

Task Force on Prisoner Reentry (2009)

JOTF helped establish a Maryland Task Force on Prisoner Reentry. The task force developed a strategic reentry plan under the federal Second Chance Act of 2007. Designed to improve outcomes for people returning from prison, the federal law authorizes grants to government agencies, community, and faith-based organizations, to provide employment assistance, substance abuse treatment, housing, and other services that reduce recidivism.

<http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/webmga/frmMain.aspx?tab=subject3&ys=2009rs/billfile/hb0637.htm>

Correctional Services - Division of Parole and Probation - Supervision Fee (2011)

JOTF successfully advocated for legislation to ensure that parolees be adequately informed of and have adequate access to the parole fee exemption process. Under this law, the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, in conjunction with the local detention centers, ensures that parolees are informed about exemption criteria and the process by which to apply for an exemption.

<http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/webmga/frmMain.aspx?tab=subject3&ys=2011rs/billfile/hb0749.htm>

Child Support - Incarcerated Obligor - Suspension of Payments and Accrual of Arrearages (2012)

Under this law, individuals sentenced to at least 18 consecutive months of imprisonment without capacity to pay, have their child support order automatically suspended. To protect the interests of the custodial parent, the Child Support Enforcement Administration sends written notice of the proposed action to the custodial parent. Child support orders are restored within 60 days of an individual's release. Those returning to society after incarceration are now more likely to maintain legitimate employment and pay their current child support.

<http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/webmga/frmMain.aspx?tab=subject3&ys=2012rs/billfile/hb0651.htm>

State Personnel - Applicants for Employment - Criminal History Records Checks (2013)

This law eliminates a requirement that state job seekers identify their criminal record by checking a box on an initial job application. Exemptions exist for positions within the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, as well as positions that statutorily require a criminal background check. Removing the box enables applicants with criminal records to earn an interview based on their qualifications rather than face automatic disqualification.

<http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/webmga/frmMain.aspx?id=sb0004&stab=01&pid=billpage&tab=subject3&ys=2013RS>

Criminal Records - Shielding - Nonviolent Misdemeanor Convictions (Ongoing)

The proposed legislation would have made certain nonviolent misdemeanor convictions eligible for shielding from public view after a five-year waiting period. Despite support from both chambers of the General Assembly, this legislation failed on the final day of the 2013 legislative session when compromise between lawmakers could not be reached.