

## FORUM HIGHLIGHTS NEED TO EDUCATE EMPLOYERS ABOUT HIRING EX-OFFENDERS

By Tom Waldron, The Hatcher Group

Maryland employers are interested in hiring ex-offenders but want to know more about the risks and rewards.

This was one of many important messages revealed at a July 17<sup>th</sup> forum that brought together over 60 employers, business groups, government officials and workforce development leaders. Forum participants discussed the issue of hiring ex-offenders and brainstormed ways to increase workforce opportunities for people with criminal backgrounds.

The forum was co-sponsored by the Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF), the Greater Baltimore Committee, Open Society Institute – Baltimore, the Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development and the Baltimore Workforce Investment Board.

Secretary Aris Melissaratos of the Department of Business and Economic Development stressed that Maryland will need large numbers of additional workers – particularly in such fields as construction and hospitality – and can not afford to write off thousands of ex-offenders.

"To meet its workforce needs, Maryland must do more to prepare people in prison to re-enter society and the workforce," he said.

"I think we need to give everyone in society hope. We need to get to the people who have gone astray in our society, train them in prison and give them the attitude that they can be productive members

of society," Melissaratos said. "We have to concentrate on giving people hope and opportunity so there's no reason to go back to prison."

John W. Ashworth III, senior vice president of the University of Maryland Medical System and chair of the Baltimore Workforce Investment Board, also stressed the importance of tapping into the ex-offender population to fill critical workforce needs.

"Businesses need workers. Workers need jobs with benefits," Ashworth said. "With over 9,000 individuals coming into Baltimore from the state prisons every year, we must recognize the workforce opportunities that this population provides – as well as the challenges."

During the forum, Ashworth outlined results from a Baltimore Workforce Investment Board survey of employers on issues regarding ex-offenders. The survey found that, among the employers who responded:

- About a third had knowingly hired ex-offenders. The rest either did not know the criminal backgrounds of their applicants or chose not to hire ex-offenders.
- A majority were unaware of tax breaks or bonding programs that are designed to encourage the hiring of ex-offenders.
- The top concerns about hiring ex-offenders were liability issues and employee drug use.
- A large number were concerned about hiring people with convictions for violent crimes.

The forum included break-out sessions during which small groups identified key concerns that prevent employers from hiring ex-offenders, as well as steps that would encourage employers to consider such hires.

One key finding was the need to educate employers, particularly human resource officials, about ex-offenders – a "nuts and bolts" guide to what the risks are and what programs are available to help employers.

One employer mentioned that having a case manager or job coach from a community-based



Aris Melissaratos

organization to work with ex-offenders would be a significant help.

Several of the small groups also stressed the need to provide training and other services to people while they are incarcerated, to prepare them for the transition back to society and the workforce.

Mary Ann Saar, secretary of the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, urged those at the event to support efforts to expand such services for inmates. The General Assembly has approved pilot initiatives in these areas, but has not funded a statewide program. "This is the kind of thing that needs to be done," Saar said.

She also thanked employers who have hired ex-offenders. "By hiring people with criminal backgrounds, you are giving them a chance to support themselves. But you are also sending an important message to other employers that these are good employees worthy of being hired," Saar said.

One of the state's largest employers, Johns Hopkins Hospital, has been a leader in hiring ex-offenders, putting about 100 on the payroll in six years.

"We can say, as an employer, we have had excellent results [hiring ex-offenders] but we recognize it's merely a drop in the bucket," said Ron Peterson, president of Johns Hopkins Hospital, where the event was held.

Don Fry, president of the Greater Baltimore Committee, said his organization has focused extensively on the issue of helping ex-offenders obtain employment.

"We support efforts to remove barriers to employment," Fry said, including expanded drug treatment and job training.

For more information on issues involving the hiring of ex-offenders, contact Jason Perkins-Cohen at JOTF: 410-234-8040, or [jason@jotf.org](mailto:jason@jotf.org).

## SAVE THE DATE! Job Opportunities Task Force Fall Forum

Sponsored by the Open Society Institute

### PAID LEAVE: WHO GETS IT, WHO DOESN'T, AND WHAT'S BEING DONE ABOUT IT



OCTOBER 11, 2006

8:30 – 10:00am

Baltimore City Community College, Corporate Training Room  
710 E. Lombard Street

Panelists:

**Kate Kahan:** National Partnership for Women & Families

**Jodie Levin-Epstein:** CLASP (Center for Law & Social Policy)

**Vicky Lovell:** Institute for Women's Policy Research

To RSVP call (410) 234-8040 or email [jessica@jotf.org](mailto:jessica@jotf.org)

### THE RESULTS ARE IN FROM JOTF'S 2007 GUBERNATORIAL CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE.

To read Governor Ehrlich and Mayor O'Malley's responses, visit [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.

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### PRAISE FROM CONGRESSMAN CUMMINGS



While speaking at the graduation ceremony for the second JumpStart class, Congressman Elijah Cummings urged graduates to appreciate their accomplishment and to make it a stepping stone for even greater success. JumpStart, a pre-apprenticeship program for the building trades, is operated by JOTF, Associated Builders and Contractors, Goodwill, and East Baltimore Community Corporation.

# Baltimore Employers: IT PAYS TO INVEST IN YOUR WORKERS!

By Jessica Traskey

## The demand for well-educated and skilled employees is on the rise.

The Johns Hopkins Health System has found that one of the most cost-effective ways to meet the workforce and skills shortages is to enhance the skills of their current workforce.

In March 2004, the Hopkins Health System was awarded a \$3 million demonstration grant by the U.S. Department of Labor. With this grant Hopkins created Project REACH (Resources and Education for the Advancement of Careers at Hopkins), which encompasses five initiatives:

- advance those with a high school diploma but low math and reading skills for college-based programs;
- expand existing training programs to fill critical shortages within the Hopkins healthcare system;
- provide an accelerated GED program;
- provide business and soft skills training for workers at risk of disciplinary action; and
- retrain of workers displaced because of advances in technology;

### A Good Return on Investment

Employers know that training is important, but they do not always recognize that raising the educational level of their employees can benefit the company as well as its workers.

High employee turnover is a significant cost to businesses. Hopkins and other healthcare institutions often pay a temp agency to fill their workforce shortages. This can be expensive for the institution and time-consuming for supervisors. Employers are now seeing that workplace training and education, such as Project REACH, reduces turnover and improves retention. A recent study by Excel Corporation, a global meat company with over 20,000 employees worldwide, found that 70% of new hires who participated in workplace education programs stayed with the company at least one year compared with only 23% of those who did not.

Pamela Paulk, Vice President for Human Resources for the Johns Hopkins Hospital and Health System explains, "We are filling our shortages with people who now are building a loyalty to our company ... Of course there is cost involved but, it's accepting the notion that it will cost money, yet in the long run it is going to save you money."

One of the most important reasons for employers to train their workforce is that it improves the quality of employees' work. In a survey conducted by The Conference Board in 1999, 80% of employers said that workplace education increased workplace performance. The Hopkins model produces a reliable and motivated workforce, which in turn makes for increased productivity.

### Challenges

For both the employer and employee there are challenges to overcome in initiating workplace education programs:

- Revisiting education can seem daunting; many employees will not have studied in a classroom for years;
- Industries might be apprehensive about introducing training and development into the workplace. Their concerns will be how the program can benefit them, what costs are involved, what are the potential losses, and is it worth their while?
- Release time for workplace training programs needs to be scheduled; and
- Staffing, planning, and coordinating a training program requires time and effort.

By developing support throughout the organization and with careful planning each of these challenges can be addressed.

### Summary

A workplace training program strengthens an organization and its workforce; it speaks immediately to the employees: The employer thinks enough of them to invest in them. Where there were shortages, job positions are filled and turnover is lower. As workers progress within an organization, their motivation and loyalty to the establishment grow even stronger, filtering to their relationships and environments outside of work.

In the context of the DoL grant, part of Hopkins' responsibility is to develop the project as a model for others, to make it replicable. As Pamela Paulk explains: "Before the grant is over, we have to package this in such a way that someone else could just pick it up and say, 'OK, this is how I can do it', and, 'This is what it would cost me to do it'. We are to build it in such a way that it is cost effective to others."

For the employer considering this training program in their workplace, Pamela Paulk advises, "First, get people in the business to really buy into it, from leadership all the way to the supervisors. It doesn't hurt that it is socially responsible and that it feels good; that's great! But to get your finance people to sign off on it, and your CEO, you are going to have to show them that it's a good deal for them."

# MANAGING WORK AND FAMILY WITHOUT PAID LEAVE: Why Low-Income Families Are Especially At Risk

By Melissa Chalmers Broome

## Parents shouldn't have to choose between caring for their sick child and keeping their job.

Unfortunately, many Maryland parents are faced with just such a choice either because their employer provides no sick leave or does not allow them to use their leave to care for family members.

Surprisingly, the United States is one of the weakest countries in the world when it comes to protecting working families. Nearly half of all private sector U.S. workers (47%) do not receive paid sick days. The U.S. government lags behind not only developed but also developing countries with its failure to ensure paid leave.

It is no secret that caregiving pressures are increasing dramatically for working families nationwide. The facts are startling:

- Nearly two-thirds of Americans under age 60 expect to be responsible for the care of an elderly relative within the next ten years.
- Parents in one study reported missing an average of 4.2 work days each year because of a sick child.
- Only 28% of unscheduled absences from work are due to personal ailments. Nearly half are a direct result of family issues such as caring for sick family members.

Most would agree that no one should have to choose between being a conscientious employee and caring for their own family's health. Nevertheless, of workers who receive paid sick leave, only one in three can use their days to care for ill children or elderly parents.

Low-wage workers are at greatest risk. Not only are they more likely to have jobs that don't come with paid sick leave, they simply cannot afford to take unpaid leave or "buy" their way out of problems through costly daycare arrangements. Instead, they are asked to make impossible choices. Staying

home with a sick child can mean risking job loss; yet leaving an ill child home alone is something no parent wants to do. With as many as one in four Americans earning poverty-level wages, the threats associated with having no paid leave are becoming dangerously prevalent.

The 1993 FMLA is the only federal legislation that has been passed with respect to work-family needs, but it does not cover everyday health concerns such as picking up a feverish child from school or taking a parent who can no longer drive to a doctor's appointment. It merely requires some employers to provide unpaid leave under limited circumstances. It fails to provide any coverage to nearly half of American workers because they work for small employers, have recently changed jobs, or work at multiple part-time jobs to make ends meet. And, among those covered in theory, people who cannot afford to take unpaid leave receive no coverage in practice.

Businesses, in fact, have much to gain from family-friendly policies. Companies that offer flexible sick leave profit from lower turnover and training costs, higher levels of productivity and customer satisfaction, and increased retention of qualified employees. In addition, the realities of today's economy indicate that corporations can no longer afford to ignore this issue. Full-time employees who also care for family members cost U.S. employers a whopping \$34 billion in 2004.

The good news is that an increasing number of advocates and citizens around the country are finding creative ways to put paid leave issues in front of their legislators. Seven states have already passed legislation to establish flexible leave policies for private employees. If you are interested in learning more about efforts in Maryland, please attend JOTF's October forum:

**[Paid Leave: Who Gets It, Who Doesn't, and What's Being Done About It.](#)**

For details, visit [www.jotf.org](http://www.jotf.org) or call (410) 234-8040.

## THE ROAD TO SUCCESS- A BRIDGE TO THE FUTURE

Lakeisha's initial contact with Johns Hopkins Hospital was in 2000. She engaged in a collaborative employability project sponsored by the Baltimore City Mayor's Office of Employment Development Civic Works and Johns Hopkins Hospital. For three months, Lakeisha developed the employability skills which helped her acquire full-time employment in the JHH Environmental Services Department. She began tutorials to prepare for the GED. In the Spring of 2005, Lakeisha applied for Project REACH and entered into the accelerated GED training resulting in Lakeisha acquiring her GED in May 2005. In November, she applied for the Pharmacy Technician training and on March 2, 2006 graduated and received a certificate of completion. Within the next year she will sit for the State Board of Pharmacy Technicians.

Currently, she has accepted a position as a Pharmacy Technician in Central Pharmacy here at JHH.



## A NATION BEHIND

### The United States lags behind every other developed and developing nations in the provision of governmental protections for workers' paid sick leave.

#### SICK LEAVE:

- 139 countries provide paid leave for short- or long-term illnesses.
- 117 countries provide a week or more of sick leave annually.
- 37 nations provide some type of paid time for working parents when a child is ill.

#### CHILDBIRTH:

- 163 countries offer paid leave related to childbirth.
- America stands with Lesotho, Papua New Guinea, and Swaziland in its failure to provide this work leave.
- Australia does not provide job-related maternity leave, but does provide one year of unpaid job leave and a lump sum payment for new babies.

#### PAID VACATION:

- 18 developed nations set a statutory minimum of 20 paid vacation days.
- 96 nations offer some level of statutory annual leave.
- Only after 25 years of work does the average U.S. worker's average number of vacation days get close to 20 paid days.

Sources: Heymann 2006; Heymann et al. 2004; Allegretto 2005.