



Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes

2020 PUBLIC POLICY PRIORITIES

The Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) advocates for legislation and budget proposals that improve the employment opportunities of Maryland's low-skill, low-income workers and families. Our advocacy work stems from a recognition that a healthy Maryland economy requires public policies that meet the workforce needs of employers and promote fair and equitable access to employment opportunities for low-income Marylanders.

When Maryland's 90-day legislative session convenes in January 2020, JOTF will support the following public policy initiatives that promote access to education, training and job opportunities for low-income workers and job seekers, the successful reentry of workers with a criminal record, workplace benefits and supports, and best-practice hiring policies:

Worker Supports and Benefits

Everyone deserves the ability to care for themselves and their families without risk to their economic stability. Yet, 40 percent of American workers are unable to earn paid sick and safe days. Among low-wage workers who can least afford to take unpaid time off when sick or to care for a sick family member, nearly 80 percent lack access to this basic benefit.

For six (6) years, JOTF partnered with over 150 organizations around the state to secure access to earned and/or job protected sick and safe leave for Maryland workers. During the 2020 legislative session, JOTF will focus efforts on the following:

- *Defending Earned Sick and Safe Leave:* JOTF will defend and protect the Maryland Healthy Working Families Act from efforts to exempt certain workers, such as health facility employees and substitute teachers, to exempt businesses with "on-site health care clinics", and from increasing the days which workers can begin earning sick and safe leave from 106 to 120 days.
- *Supporting Paid Family Leave:* JOTF will support efforts to explore the establishment of a family and medical leave insurance program that would provide workers with up to 12 weeks annually of paid leave supported by an employer-employee contribution model.

Decriminalize Poverty - Reduce Impact of Incarceration on Workers

JOTF knows that a criminal record can serve as the cause and consequence of poverty. In 2018, JOTF released its groundbreaking report, "The Criminalization of Poverty: How to Break the Cycle Through Policy Reform in Maryland" that examines state laws and policies that criminalize and penalize poor communities of color, and provides policy recommendations to dismantle these practices and systems. JOTF defines "the criminalization of poverty" as state laws, policies and practices that unnecessarily penalize the poor. This includes policies that facilitate regular interaction with the criminal justice system through racial profiling, child support debt, and motor vehicle laws; court-related fines and fees; and the collateral consequences of a criminal record.

Thus, a criminal record can be both the cause and consequence of poverty, even if the record does not include a conviction. During the 2020 state legislative session, JOTF will support the following proposals to reduce the impact of incarceration on workers:

JOTF JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

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1. Eliminate the suspension of a driver's license due to unpaid fines and fees, and provide for the statewide use of payment plans or community-based alternative payment methods, such as job skills training, or adult education programs;
2. Support the full implementation of the current Court of Appeals rule on pretrial detention, including additional funding to ensure that every jurisdiction has a robust pretrial services system;
3. Require indigency determinations to determine ability to pay when assigning certain "non-financial" conditions of pretrial release that have fees attached, such as GPS monitoring;
4. Establish a statewide process that provides pretrial defendants and misdemeanants with access to voting while incarcerated, as allowed by law;
5. Support legislative recommendations from the state-commissioned Low-Income Obligor Working Group, such as the use of minimum orders for those who are unemployed and underemployed, and legislation to support effective implementation of the current laws that provide for the suspension of orders due to criminal detainment or rehabilitative treatment;
6. Support the creation of a low-cost automobile insurance pilot program and the elimination of non-driving factors such as credit, education, income, and zip code in automobile insurance premium rates;
7. Establish pre-release centers and options for incarcerated women and programming aligned with employment opportunities for successful reintegration back into society;
8. Reducing barriers to occupational licensing for low-skill, low-income workers, particularly workers with a criminal background;
9. Expanding access to criminal record expungement via:
 - a. Repeal of the "unit rule";
 - b. Automatically expunge non-convictions (Acquittal, Dismissal, Probation before Judgment, and Stet);
 - c. Provide clarification on the expungement eligibility of arrest warrants/invalidated warrants;
 - d. Make nonviolent misdemeanor and felony convictions eligible for expungement at three (3) and five (5) years, respectfully, after the completion of the individual's sentence and any mandatory supervision.

Access to Adult Education, Skills Training

Access to post-secondary education can strengthen Maryland's families and communities and improve outcomes for the working poor. It is well established that workers with college experience are more likely to move out of poverty and attain higher-paying jobs, yet low-income and "non-traditional" students and adult workers face significant barriers to post-secondary educational options, and affordability is high on the list of challenges. During the 2020 legislative session, JOTF will actively monitor the state budget to encourage program innovation and direct state aid resources to the students who need them most, including:

1. Expanding investments in the Employment Advancement Right Now (EARN) Program, particularly within state-designated Opportunity Zones, for training programs to reduce barriers and prepare workers for career mobility and pathways, especially incumbent workers, and supporting meaningful initiatives that expand apprenticeships, on-the-job training and adult basic education.
2. Increasing support for correctional education, including access and affordability of GED testing and college courses, expansion of diminution credits for the completion of vocational training/academic credentialing, and access to occupational training and licensing for individuals preparing to exit the correctional facilities.