

JOTF JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes

2020 PUBLIC POLICY AGENDA

The Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) advocates for legislative and budget proposals to improve the employment opportunities for 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.

During the 90-day legislative session in Annapolis, 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 opportunity 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 when workers can begin earning sick and safe leave from 106 to 120 days.
- *Supporting Paid Family Leave:* JOTF supports [Senate Bill 539](#) / [House Bill 839](#) “*Labor and Employment – Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program – Establishment*” (*The Time to Care Act of 2020*) which establishes 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:

1. [Senate Bill 234](#) / [House Bill 280](#) *as amended* would prohibit the suspension of a driver’s license due to unpaid traffic fines and fees; provide for installment payment plans; eliminate punitive enforcement in the event of default of payment;
2. [Senate Bill 513](#) / [House Bill 1377](#) would 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;

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3. [Senate Bill 372](#) / [House Bill 568](#) would require the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services to provide voter registration forms to individuals release from correctional facilities and to establish a statewide process that provides pretrial defendants and misdemeanants with access to voting while incarcerated, as allowed by law;
4. [Senate Bill 847](#) / [House Bill 946](#) reflects the legislative recommendations of the state-commissioned Low-Income Obligor Working Group. The proposed legislation would, among others, eliminate imputation of income and provide for use of minimum orders for obligors who are un- and underemployed; provide for effective implementation of the current laws regarding the suspension of orders due to criminal detainment or rehabilitative treatment;
5. [Senate Bill 934](#) / [House Bill 660](#) would establish the creation of a low-cost automobile insurance pilot program
6. [Senate Bill 470](#) / [House Bill 431](#) would prohibit use of non-driving factors such as credit, education, income, and zip code in automobile insurance premium rates;
7. [Senate Bill 682](#) / [House Bill 608](#) would require establishment of pre-release centers and options for incarcerated women; [Senate Bill 684](#) / [House Bill 801](#) would require programming aligned with employment opportunities for successful reintegration back into society; and [Senate Bill 683](#) / [House Bill 828](#) would require pre-release centers to located in the communities that receive the largest percentage of women returning from incarceration;
8. Expanding access to criminal record expungement via:
 - a. [Senate Bill 589](#) / [House Bill 1336](#) would repeal the notorious “unit rule” to allow eligible non-convictions within a unit of charges to remain eligible for expungement;
 - b. [House Bill 1335](#) would eliminate the petition filing requirement and provide for the automatic expungement of non-convictions (Acquittal, Dismissal, Nolle Prosequi, Probation before Judgment, and Stet) under certain conditions;
 - c. [House Bill 1343](#) would clarify expungement eligibility for invalidated warrants and provides for the expungement of nonviolent misdemeanor and felony convictions 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

It is well established that workers with college experience are more likely to attain higher-paying jobs. Access to post-secondary education improves outcomes for the working poor and strengthens Maryland families and communities. Yet, low-income, “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 and supporting meaningful initiatives that expand apprenticeships, on-the-job training and adult basic education.
2. [Senate Bill 922](#) / [House Bill 812](#) would increase the number of diminution credits to 90 days that inmates can earn for the completion of vocational training and academic credentialing.