

JOTF JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes

2022 Public Policy Agenda

The Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) advocates for legislative and budget proposals to improve the educational and employment opportunities for Maryland's low-skill, low-income workers and families. Our public policy advocacy 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 educational and employment opportunities for low-income Marylanders.

During the 90-day legislative session in Annapolis, JOTF will support the following public policy initiatives that 1.) promote access to jobs, skills training, and benefits, 2.) decriminalize poverty via criminal justice reforms, and 3.) increase transportation access for low-income workers and job seekers:

JOB ACCESS & QUALITY

The Give Me A Chance Act

It is well established that workers with a 4-year college degree are more likely to attain higher-paying jobs yet 63% of Maryland's workforce lack access to a college degree. Most of Maryland's workforce is skilled through alternative routes (e.g. military, apprenticeships, fellowships, skilled trades, community college, direct front line experience, etc.) but are denied access to employment or promotion because they lack the specified four-year degree. To increase access to interviews for the majority of Maryland's workforce, JOTF is proposing legislation that will prohibit employers from asking about a college degree on initial job applications or demanding one for internal advancement. Licensed professional positions (e.g. lawyer, doctor, etc.) are exempted from this legislative proposal.

Budget Monitoring: EARN, Increased Investments in Skills Training

JOTF will actively monitor the state budget to encourage program innovation and direct state aid resources to the students who need them most. This includes 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.

Paid Family Medical Leave - Time2Care Act

When a new mother gives birth or a family member becomes ill and needs a caretaker, 86% of workers in private industry (especially lower-income workers of color) have to choose between caring for family or losing a paycheck. The "Time to Care Act" establishes the Family and

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Medical Leave Insurance (FAMLI) program and FAMLI Fund to provide up to 12 weeks of paid leave to individuals taking leave specifically for medical or family-related circumstances.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

Maryland REDEEM Act of 2022 - Reducing Expungement Waiting Periods

A criminal record can easily be both the cause and consequence of poverty. The appearance of a criminal record on a routine background check can, and many times will, block access to employment, education, housing, and occupational licensing- all of which are necessary to advance in Maryland. JOTF seeks to expand access to criminal record expungement for the 1.5 million Marylanders with a criminal record by allowing nonviolent misdemeanor and felony convictions to be eligible for expungement within three (3) and (5) years, respectively, after completing any mandatory supervision, including parole and probation. The bill also balances the expungement waiting periods for other minor offenses with the provisions of the bill.

Pretrial Home Detention - Funding for Electronic Monitoring

In 2021, [JOTF supported legislation](#) that assures that the state will pay the exorbitant cost of private home detention monitoring fees for indigent defendants on pretrial. This was a huge win for impacted persons throughout the state as there was no unified policy on how pretrial home detention should be funded. Certain jurisdictions allowed private industry to charge up to \$500 a month in electronic monitoring fees to the state's poorest populations, with incarceration as a possible risk of non-payment. While this was a massive success in JOTF's ongoing effort to decriminalize poverty, the bill's funding is set to expire in June 2022. This session, JOTF will advocate both for enhanced funding and a three-year extension to the court's private home detention monitoring program.

TRANSPORTATION ACCESS

Child Support - Repeal Driver's License Suspensions for Lower-Income Obligor

Mobility is key in Maryland's regional economy. Nearly half of Marylanders travel outside of their county for employment and only 9% of jobs in the Baltimore region can be reached within one-hour, one-way by public transit. A vehicle and a valid driver's license are thus necessary to obtain and sustain employment. When an individual misses two months of child support payments, their driver's license will be suspended regardless of their ability to pay. This directly jeopardizes access to employment for lower-income workers and complicates already tense relationships with families. This session, JOTF is pushing legislation to eliminate driver's license suspensions for child support obligors making less than 300% of the federal poverty line (~\$39,000).

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Auto Insurance Affordability – Eliminating Use of Non-Driving Factors

Maryland law allows private auto insurers to utilize non-driving related factors including credit scores, education level, occupation, and zip code to set insurance premiums. The use of these factors results in disproportionately high premiums for low-income workers of color who simply can't afford it. The Consumer Federation of America found that good drivers with low credit scores or in predominantly African American zip codes are charged nearly double what their counterparts are, controlling for all other factors including driving record. This session, JOTF will support legislation that would allow for the elimination of credit history and zip code as cost factors in auto insurance rates to increase access to affordable transportation options for low-wage workers.

Motor Vehicle Laws - Decriminalize Driving While Poor

In Maryland, driving uninsured is an incarcerable offense of up to one year in jail, a \$1000 fine, or both, for the *first* offense. Yet over 500,000 Marylanders drive uninsured throughout the state citing the cost of auto insurance as the primary factor. The insurance industry's use of non-driving related factors such as credit history and zip code double the cost for Maryland's lowest-income communities, effectively pricing them out of the market. JOTF believes that an individual's poverty should not determine their mobility or limit their access to employment. In our ongoing efforts to decriminalize poverty, JOTF is pursuing legislation to eliminate incarceration as a penalty for driving uninsured.