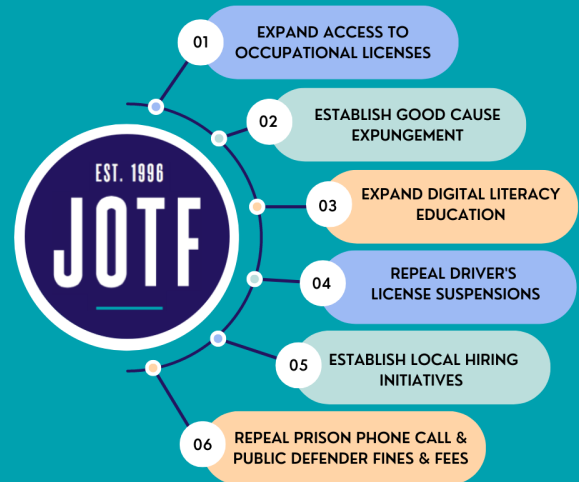


JOTF JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes

The Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) advocates for legislative and budget proposals to improve employment opportunities for Maryland’s low-income workers and their families. Our work recognizes that a healthy Maryland economy requires public policies that meet the workforce needs of employers while promoting fair and equitable access to employment opportunities for low-income Marylanders.

JOTF 2024 POLICY AGENDA



JOTF Policy Priorities 2024 Legislative Session

Expand Access to Occupational Licensing

Marylanders can be locked out of occupations requiring occupational licenses. Several reports have found that individuals with criminal records in the state face significant barriers to employment. The convergence of licensing denials due to criminal convictions and the number of individuals with criminal records creates a significant employment barrier that disproportionately impacts Black and Latino populations. JOTF is advocating for policy that would clarify the licensing standards related to the use for a prior conviction so that individuals are not immediately deterred from seeking a license and denied a license, and strengthen due process safeguards by placing the burden of proof on the state to establish why a license should not be granted.

Establish Good Cause Expungement

Having a prior criminal conviction keeps individuals out of the workforce, contributes to recidivism, and is a public safety issue. One of the primary drivers of high recidivism rates is the inability of returning citizens to find a job within the first year, but having a past criminal conviction of any sort reduces job offers by half. JOTF is advocating that a “Good Cause” Expungement Provision be added in statute to allow the courts that levy charges against an individual to expunge those charges upon an adequate showing of good cause.

Expand Digital Literacy Education

Too many Marylanders lack digital literacy skills, and this issue will only be exacerbated by an economy that is increasingly becoming more tech based. This issue is especially detrimental to returning citizens. According to a recent report, in 10 years, 90% of jobs will require basic digital literacy skills, which only 32% of the US population currently has. JOTF is advocating for policy that would ensure that incarcerated individuals have access to high quality digital literacy curriculum that is regularly assessed and updated.

Repeal Driver's License Suspensions

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 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. JOTF is advocating for legislation will eliminate driver’s license suspensions as a penalty for child support obligors making less than 250% of the federal poverty line.

Establish Local Hiring Initiatives

Decades of disinvestment and exclusionary policies and hiring practices have isolated many people of color and low-income people from jobs in their communities. In Baltimore City, fewer than 50% of residents work locally. State and Federally-assisted construction projects create jobs but, without intervention, will exacerbate existing race and gender based employment disparities. JOTF is advocating that state agencies require construction contractors that are awarded state contracts, including state contracts that are federally assisted, to set participation goals for women, people of color, and local residents for each trade working on the project.

Repeal Prison Phone Call and Public Defender Fines and Fees

Criminal Justice debt contributes to the cycle of poverty and serves as another penalty because many individuals do not have the means to pay, failing to pay results in additional fines and penalties, and the burden of the debt falls on both the individual and the family. JOTF is advocating for legislation that would repeal the provision that allows the Court to order payment of Public Defender costs as a condition of the sentence, judgment, or probation, and that would require that the Department of Corrections provide adequate infrastructure to support nocost voice communication services to persons committed to state correctional facilities, state prisons and county correctional facilities, including jails.