



CENTER FOR EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Public Hearing Public Protection February 13, 2025

Dear Chair Krueger, Chair Pretlow and Members of the Senate and Assembly,

My name is Alyssa Bradley, and I am a Policy Manager with The Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO). I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today about CEO and our work across New York, and the need for increased resources for New Yorkers returning home from prison.

Background on CEO

CEO has nearly 40 years of experience in workforce development programming. Our mission is to provide immediate, effective, and comprehensive employment services to individuals recently returning home from incarceration. As the largest provider of reentry employment services in New York, we serve individuals on parole and probation supervision in Albany, Buffalo, Rochester, and New York City with an intentional focus on individuals facing the most significant barriers, while also returning \$3.30 for every \$1 of public investment into CEO's program.

After our participants complete our orientation class, CEO hires and provides them with immediate, paid employment through our transitional work crews, and offers advanced training opportunities in key industry sectors. CEO operates more than 35 work crews across New York state that provide public sector agencies with a variety of general labor services. Access to immediate work through a transitional job helps our participants gain stability and motivation to attain long-term, quality full-time jobs outside of CEO.

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We appreciate Governor Hochul's attention to reentry services in the Executive Budget and for continuing to allocate funding to assist people returning from incarceration as they navigate reentry. However, we must do more. CEO urges the legislature to consider our recommendations to ensure the investment brings additional capacity to serve formerly incarcerated people, innovative and implement new strategies to target this population to increase public safety, and ensure the process is equitable.

While we focus primarily on employment services, CEO maintains a commitment to meeting participants' complex needs through wraparound and supportive services. Providing wrap-around services alleviates barriers that normally prevent individuals from completing programs and successfully gaining employment. For example, our staff maintain close ties with community partners to provide referrals for mental health, housing, legal, and other supportive services.

Community organizations and providers provide an excellent employment opportunity for individuals on parole. The nonprofit community in New York is one of the largest industries in the state and the



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reentry nonprofit service provider community in particular employs thousands of individuals. These agencies often recruit individuals who have lived experience and direct experience in the legal system as a key qualification for their positions.

Additionally, an essential part of CEO's broader strategy is ensuring individuals have access to immediate financial resources upon release. For many of the individuals we serve, the transition from incarceration is marked by food insecurity, unstable housing, and justice-related debts—obstacles that hinder reentry success. The Reentry Assistance Program (A193), led by Assemblymember Gibbs, is a critical piece of legislation that would address this gap by increasing the financial assistance provided to returning citizens at their most vulnerable time, and aligns with Governor Hochul's commitment to facilitating employment for individuals on parole and reducing recidivism across the state.

To provide further context on the bill - annually, approximately 9,000 New Yorkers are released from a state prison with only \$200 - that includes the residuals taken from their commissary accounts and meager in-prison wages. To change the current system, New York must innovate beyond the outdated concept of "gate money" and establish a sustainable reentry fund. The Reentry Assistance Program will create this fund, and provide eligible New Yorkers approximately \$425 per month during the first six months post-release, to address vital needs. By addressing income insecurity directly, we can diminish recidivism and enhance public safety. Our Reentry Cash Coalition is prioritizing the passing of this piece of legislation this upcoming session.

These are sound investments and policy changes the state can and should adopt through the budget. With additional financial backing, these organizations can expand their impact and enhance partnerships with local businesses and government agencies to create a more holistic, sustainable reentry process.

I want to close with direct testimony from one of our former clients and Advocacy Leadership Committee members Maria Nieves - *"People often think reentry is simple — go home, get a job, move forward. But it's not that easy. Returning home after incarceration is filled with barriers, from securing basic necessities to overcoming the stigma that follows us. Immediate financial assistance can make an incredible difference, providing the foundation for stability and success. I know this firsthand, and I want this opportunity for everyone coming home. Together, we can make this a reality by passing this bill and ensuring meaningful financial assistance for all returning citizens."*

Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations.

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