



# From Incarceration to Employment: Investments in Rehabilitation

## Investment in incarcerated individuals and the barriers to employment

Educational and workforce training are essential elements of the rehabilitation process and are valuable tools for lowering recidivism rates. A [report](#) from the National Institute of Justice on correctional programming concluded that participation in education programming can reduce recidivism rates and increase the odds of post-release employment. Individuals are less likely to commit crime when they work and have stable and satisfying employment that they believe has the potential for a career. Further, employment programming has been generally found to reduce both violent and nonviolent prison misconduct and disciplinary infractions.

## Current Correctional Programming

The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections offers a number of training and education programs to prepare inmates for success upon their release. All inmates entering into the correctional system are classified at either SCI Camp Hill, SCI Graterford (males) or SCI Muncy (females). The Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) is one of the educational assessments administered during the classification process. Any inmate who does not possess a GED or high school diploma is mandated to attend 360 hours of academic programming. Educational programs offered by the Department of Corrections include Adult Basic Education, English as a Second Language, the ADULT Commonwealth Secondary Diploma Program, and Vocational Education. Vocational and Certification Programs include Business Education, Cosmetology, a Barber Program, Plumbing, and HVAC.

For a full list of vocational programs and certifications available by prison, see: [PA Correctional Programming](#).

In addition to the standard educational programs provided by the Department of Corrections, some correctional facilities offer several unique education and employment opportunities, including Prison Correctional Industries, the Inside-Out Program and the Second Chance Pell Program.

### Prison Correctional Industries (PCI)

Prison Correctional Industries (PCI) is an independent industry within the Department of Corrections that employs inmates to produce a variety of items that are available for sale to non-profit organizations and government entities located throughout the commonwealth. Products manufactured by inmates range from apparel and bags to workout equipment and license plates. Currently, PCI employs 1,651 state inmates at 20 different State Correctional Institutions (SCIs).

PCI does not receive funding from the General Fund; instead, PCI is self-sustaining through the sale of PCI products and services.

### Inside-Out Program

Developed by Temple University, the Inside-Out program brings together college students and incarcerated students with the intent to facilitate informative dialogue. This program originated from the belief that when people of opposite social classes are brought together and engage with each other as equals, there is an opportunity for these groups to collectively engender solutions to social concerns. This semester-long program is held in a prison, jail or other correctional setting. Currently, over 20 higher education institutions collaborate with the Inside-Out Program throughout state correctional facilities.

## Second Chance Pell Program

Through the Second Chance Pell Program, eligible inmates are awarded a federal Pell Grant to pursue postsecondary education with the goal of helping them obtain family sustaining jobs upon their release. The Second Chance Pell Program was established as an experiment to determine if higher education had a notable impact on the recidivism rate. Research is still ongoing to determine the impact of this program on recidivism and a final report is expected in 2022.

Funding for this program is provided through the U.S Department of Education's Second Chance Act Award. A limited number of incarcerated individuals are awarded scholarships. Currently, three higher education institutes partner with the commonwealth to administer this program at six state correctional intuitions.

Educational Institution	Courses offered for a...	State Correctional Institution
Bloomsburg University	Certificate in Rehabilitative Justice	SCI Muncy SCI Mahanoy
Indiana University of Pennsylvania	Associate of the Arts degree in General Studies	SCI Pine Grove SCI Houtzdale
Lehigh Carbon Community College	Associate in Applied Science in Business Management Associate in Applied Science in Accounting Specialized Diploma in Entrepreneurship and Small Business	SCI Frackville SCI Mahanoy

## Funding

In 2021/22, \$42.6 million was appropriated for correctional education training. This was an increase from \$41.6 million in 2020/21, although it is level funded with 2019/20.

## Policy Reform

In an effort to eliminate employment barriers and modernize the commonwealth's job licensing structure for individuals with a criminal history, the General Assembly and Governor Wolf have implemented several criminal justice reform measures, including the initiatives below.

### [Executive Order 2017-3: Review of State Professional and Occupational Licensure Board Requirements and Processes](#)

In 2017, Governor Wolf signed an executive order that mandated the review of job licensing and established a task force to champion the effort. The governor's task force produced a [report](#), which disclosed that an individual's prior criminal history can have a notable impact on an applicant's ability to acquire a professional license. For instance, 13 of the commonwealth's licensing boards had a mandatory 10-year licensure ban on all applicants who were convicted of a drug related felony. In addition, all boards were required by law to consider an applicant's criminal conviction when making licensure decisions. These policies denied thousands of Pennsylvanians an opportunity to obtain family-sustaining employment.

### Clean Slate

Act 57 of 2018, also known as Clean Slate, allows minor, non-violent cases to be automatically sealed from public view after a set amount of time has passed without a new conviction of a felony or misdemeanor. Any offense sealed under Clean Slate is not required to be reported to employers, landlords, or colleges, and they may not be used to deny state occupational licenses.



The process for sealing a record is an automated process and qualifying individuals do not need to pay a fee or initiate court proceedings to have their criminal records (for certain offenses) sealed after the criteria and time frames have been met. On June 28, 2019, the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) and Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) began identifying and completing the processing of records that are eligible for Clean Slate Limited Access.

Act 83 of 202 expanded Clean Slate by extending automatic expungement to anyone who received a full acquittal or pardon from the governor. Act 83 also removed the requirement that applicants pay court fines and costs. Individuals must still pay restitution before having their records sealed.

As of September 2021, the PSP and AOPC have processed nearly 37 million records.

### [Ban the box](#)

To further eliminate detrimental employment barriers, Governor Wolf announced in 2017 that state agencies under his jurisdiction will remove the criminal conviction question on non-civil service employment applications (also known as “banning the box”). This policy provides individuals with an opportunity to be judged based on their skills and qualifications, rather than their criminal past. Ban the box provides millions of Pennsylvanians a fair chance at employment and an opportunity to contribute to society.

Ban the box does not prohibit criminal background checks.

Governor Wolf encourages agencies that are not under his jurisdiction to implement the same policy.

### [Act 53 of 2020](#)

On July 1, 2020 Act 53 (previously SB 637) was signed into law. Act 53 changes state licensure policy to ensure criminal convictions do not automatically preclude an individual from obtaining an occupational license.

Act 53 makes the following notable changes to the Commonwealth’s 29 occupational licensing boards:

- Prohibits boards and commissions from using an individual’s criminal history to preclude them from receiving an occupational license, unless the crime is directly related to the license they wish to obtain. This includes juvenile convictions or convictions that have been expunged.
- Mandates the Department of State to develop a best practice guide to assist applicants with a criminal history who are seeking to obtain a license.
- Requires licensing commissioners to publish a schedule of criminal convictions that may constitute grounds to refuse to issue, suspend or revoke a license, certificate, registration or permit for each occupation or profession.
- Allows boards and commissions to issue preliminary decisions expressing the likelihood that an individual with a criminal record would qualify for a license, to save the individual’s resources on training and fees.
- Establishes restricted licenses for some reentrants who would otherwise be denied a license based on their criminal history but received training in a correctional facility for an occupation that requires a license, registration, or permit to engage in that occupation.

