

---

---

# SAFER FOUNDATION

## COUNCIL OF ADVISORS TO REDUCE RECIDIVISM THROUGH EMPLOYMENT (C.A.R.R.E.)

### FIRST POLICY PAPER SERIES ON ISSUES AFFECTING THE EMPLOYMENT OF FORMER OFFENDERS IN ILLINOIS

#### FOUR PAPERS

THE NEED FOR PUBLIC POLICY AND ADVOCACY TO REDUCE BARRIERS  
TO EMPLOYMENT OF EX-OFFENDERS

REDUCING BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR WOMEN EX-OFFENDERS:  
MAPPING THE ROAD TO RE-INTEGRATION

GOVERNMENT PERSONNEL POLICIES IMPACTING THE HIRING  
OF EX-OFFENDERS

A REVIEW OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS PROFESSIONAL AND  
OCCUPATIONAL LICENSURE POLICIES AS RELATED TO EMPLOYMENT  
FOR EX-OFFENDERS

*December 2002*

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*On behalf of the Safer Foundation and our clients, I wish to express gratitude to all of the participants of the Council of Advisors to Reduce Recidivism through Employment (C.A.R.R.E) and our Director of Public Policy and Advocacy, Sharron D. Matthews, for their commitment and on-going work to eliminate systemic barriers to employment for ex-offenders. In addition, I offer a special thanks to the following individuals, educational institutions, and foundations responsible for, and involved in, the production of this first series of policy papers.*

- Dr. Patricia O'Brien - Jane Addams College of Social Work, University of Illinois at Chicago
- Amanda Casarjian - DePaul University
- Professor Alicia Alvarez – DePaul University Legal Clinic
- Dr. Michael Bennett- Egan Urban Center, DePaul University
- Deborah Harrington -The Woods Fund of Chicago
- Susan Tucker - Open Society Institute

*It is our hope that these policy papers, as well as those to follow, provide added information, data and insight that will facilitate and support increased advocacy on the issues directly impacting the employability of current and former offenders.*

*B. Diane Williams  
President and CEO  
Safer Foundation  
December 2002*

## **Introduction and Overview of Policy Papers Written by Participants of the Council of Advisors to Reduced Recidivism through Employment (C.A.R.R.E.)**

**By Sharron D. Matthews, Director of Public Policy and Advocacy, Safer Foundation**

**December 2002**

In March of 2001, the Safer Foundation embarked on a public policy focused path to address the issue of systemic barriers to employment for ex-offenders. This approach centered around the implementation of a new public policy and advocacy initiative funded by the Woods Fund of Chicago and the Open Society Institute based in the city of New York. As a central component of the initiative, the Safer Foundation organized a council of advocates and subject matter experts. The individuals recruited were leaders in the ex-offender community, administrators of government and nonprofit employment, supportive and legal services agencies, researchers and policy analysts, directors of community organizations, businesses and educational institutions as well as legislators and other public officials. This group, named the Council of Advisors to Reduce Recidivism through Employment (C.A.R.R.E.), first convened in June of 2001. The Council now has forty (40) participants. Based on a review of the most common barriers to employment for former offenders, four (4) separate committees were formed and charged with the development and implementation of advocacy strategies to eliminate or reduced the selected barriers.

Part of any effective advocacy strategy is the conducting of action-oriented research on the issues to be addressed. During the initial literature review and data gathering process, it was discovered that there was a dearth of works produced by local subject matter experts in Chicago on policy in this particular area. In response to this void, and as the first phase of the advocacy strategies developed, several C.A.R.R.E. participants volunteered to conduct such research and write policy papers regarding their findings and recommendations for change.

This publication is a collection of four (4) policy papers and is the first of a series to be produced by participants of C.A.R.R.E. For the reader's convenience, what follows is a brief summary of each document.

### **Policy Paper #1- The Need for Public Policy Advocacy to Reduce Barriers to Employment for Ex-Offenders by Sharron D. Matthews, Safer Foundation**

This paper was developed as a reference and backdrop for the others that were to be written. It is intentionally broader in scope and not as detailed per issue. It provides an historical overview of the evolution of the body of public policies that has served to facilitate, albeit inadvertently in some cases, the development of a complex matrix of structural barriers to legal and gainful employment for former offenders throughout America, and in particular, within the state of Illinois. The document examines the need for, and the organizational development benefits of, establishing a public policy and advocacy initiative, as the Safer Foundation has, to more

effectively address such issues. This paper was particularly written for agencies that provide employment and supportive services to ex-offenders. Recommendations are included to eliminate or reduce the designated barriers discussed.

## **Policy Paper # 2- Reducing Barriers to Employment for Women Ex-Offenders: Mapping the Road to Reintegration by Dr. Patricia O'Brien, Jane Addams College of Social Work, University of Illinois at Chicago**

Women are now the fastest growing segment of the offender and former offender populations. Not unlike their male counterparts, they have gender specific needs that must be addressed during incarceration and upon release in order for them to successfully become employed to support themselves and their children. Unlike the men, however, at the time of incarceration two-thirds of women have children for whom they are the primary caregivers and financial supporters. This phenomenal and unprecedented rise in the rates of female incarceration has given a new meaning to the phrase "Latch Key" children in America. Currently, 1.5 million children have a mother and/or father in prison. This paper examines not so much the causes as the consequences of the incarceration of women, and what can be done within the policy arena to reduce their recidivism rates by increasing their "employability quotients" before and after release.

## **Policy Paper #3- Government Personnel Policies Impacting the Hiring of Ex-offenders by Sharron D. Matthews and Amanda Casarjian, Safer Foundation**

The Illinois Department of Correction's recidivism rate is fast approaching fifty percent (50%). Approximately twenty-seven thousand (27,000) individuals are scheduled for release from Illinois state prisons this year. All of them will need access to legal livable wage employment as an alternative to crime in order to make more positive life choices for themselves and their families. For such job opportunities to be available at the *en masse* level needed, large organizations and companies that are labor intensive will need to be accessed. Government is the second largest employer in America. However, due to policy changes in hiring and retention concerning individuals with criminal records, jobs with good wages and benefits may not be available to those seeking employment regardless of qualifications or demonstrated rehabilitation. Some of these policies may also impact former offenders who are currently employed within government agencies or, in some cases, organizations that receive financial support from government. This document provides a review of the current hiring policies of many of the governmental agencies based in Chicago, their impact on ex-offenders, and examines the role of government as the primary exemplar for anti-discrimination and fair labor practices in this country. Recommendations are offered to reduce such barriers while also ensuring the quality of the workforce and public safety as related to products and service delivery.

## **Policy Paper # 4- A Review of the State of Illinois Professional and Occupational Licensure Policies as Related to Access to Employment for Ex-Offenders**

Currently, there are ninety-nine (99) statutes in Illinois that govern the issuance of licensure for all professional and occupational designated categories of employment. Of these, fifty- seven (57) contain some form of restrictive language for access to licenses by former offenders with crimes ranging from misdemeanors to felonies. Some include an absolute bar to licensure based on certain types and levels of crimes. Access to a total of sixty-five (65) different professions and occupations is impacted. Historically, many of these represent the kinds of jobs and careers that have provided access to not only the labor market but also to the possibility of self-employment and business ownership, especially for immigrants and people of color. Access to such employment opportunities has proved in the past and, albeit in a more limited manner, in the present to facilitate subsequent job creation along with the economic rise of the working and middle classes in the same African-American and Latino-American inner- city communities where the overwhelming majority of ex-offenders are returning upon release. This paper reviews statutes related to twenty-two (22) of the professions/occupations impacted and their concomitant regulations and application forms from the perspective of increasing access to licensure for former offenders. Recommendations are offered based on the findings of three reviews conducted in collaboration with the DePaul University Legal Clinic in Chicago, Illinois.

Please note that these papers were not written from the perspective of simply being critical of the policies selected for review. They should be viewed, and were produced, as action-oriented research that can provide additional data, insight and recommendations for advocacy to improve access to legal gainful employment for men, women and youth who have paid their debts to society. Now these individuals need assistance in rejoining that society as productive and contributing individuals, family members, and citizens. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and, therefore, are not necessarily reflective of the official positions of the Council of Advisors to Reduce Recidivism through Employment as a whole or of the Safer Foundation.

Each policy paper is also available on-line at:

[www.SAFERFOUNDATION.ORG](http://www.SAFERFOUNDATION.ORG)

*by clicking on Policy and Advocacy and then on the specific title of the particular document.*