



catalyst

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Safer Foundation and its partners helped pass Senate Bill 1050, which will help reduce legislative barriers to employment for its clients.

Safer Foundation celebrates passage and implementation of certificates legislation

Effective January 1, 2010, Senate Bill 1050 (SB 1050) became a law, representing the culmination of Safer Foundation’s most successful legislative effort to date. People with criminal records across the state now have a better chance to earn professional certificates, assets that will help them be more competitive on the job market.

“This means that occupations that were previously denied our clients are now available,” said Veronica Cunningham, Safer’s Vice President of Public Policy and External Relations. “This legislation clearly increases the likelihood of a number of our clients finding employment and possibly even starting their own businesses, which is key.”

The effort began last legislative session, when Safer Foundation supported a bill spearheaded by primary sponsors Sen. Kwame Raoul and Rep. Barbara Flynn Currie. As it was written, SB 1050 amended and expanded legislation enabling people with criminal records to obtain Certificates of Relief from Disability (for occupational licensing) and Certificates of Good Conduct (for general employment and reputation).

Protestants for the Common Good joined the effort and worked on a provision in SB 1050 that required the Department of Professional Regulation to provide free-of-charge, non-binding advisory opinion for people with criminal records who wish to obtain the

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From the President's Desk



The federal economic stimulus package, as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), has spurred job creation by funding "shovel ready" projects across the country. Safer Foundation is proud to be a part of this recovery process. Through ARRA stimulus funds, we have initiated several new programs that have provided nearly 300 new jobs for our clients.

The Neighborhood Clean-Up Program, through the City of Chicago Department of Family and Supportive Services, allows clients the opportunity to join work crews and participate in community beautification projects like snow removal and alley upkeep in City neighborhoods. Thanks to an award from the City of Chicago Department of Environment, Safer has also teamed up with Garfield Park Conservatory to provide green jobs training in sustainable landscaping for people with criminal records in Chicago's East Garfield Park community.

The Deconstruction Work Services Training Program, made possible thanks to the Chicago Department of Community Development, provides clients with training related to the controlled demolition of buildings and the salvaging of materials. Safer has also partnered with WRD/Greencorps for the Department of Environment's Green Jobs Training and Experience Program, which will provide additional green jobs training opportunities for Safer clients.

We are excited to be a part of these landmark programs and hope that Safer Foundation continues to be a part of the economic recovery process as well as continuing our work to help rebuild lives, families, and communities.

Sincerely,

B. Diane Williams

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Department's guidance regarding whether their criminal record prohibits them from obtaining a license.

Under SB 1050, the pool of eligible offenses has been vastly increased to include any offense less than a Class X felony that did not result in "great bodily harm or permanent disability," which is not a post-sentence registration offense (sexual assault, arson, etc), aggravated DUI or aggravated domestic battery. Everything else is eligible with not more than two felonies.

Also, SB 1050 entirely removes the Prisoner Review Board's jurisdiction for rehabilitation certificate cases and routes all

such cases to the Circuit Court where the conviction was entered.

"It's a big victory for us," Cunningham said. "Our partners, who already respected the work we have done, now have a renewed sense of how committed Safer is to making changes in the lives of individuals who have criminal records."

To implement SB 1050, Safer Foundation is presently assembling a first class cadre of pro bono attorneys from Chicago and downstate law firms, law school clinics and public interest law firms. This will allow anyone who is eligible for a rehabilitation certificate can be represented by able and experienced counsel.

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Raoul, roundtables highlight 8th Annual CARRE Conference

After a successful year on the policy front, the Council of Advisors to Reduce Recidivism through Employment (CARRE) gathered for its 8th Annual Public Policy Conference. Held at the UIC Forum, the event celebrated the group's 2009 accomplishments and discussed what further advocacy needed to be carried out to ensure the dissolution of legislative barriers to employment for people with criminal records.



Illinois State Senator Kwame Raoul delivers his keynote speech at the 8th Annual CARRE Policy Conference at the UIC Forum.

Illinois State Senator Kwame Raoul (D-13th District) gave the keynote address. In his remarks, he reminded the audience that “trying to reduce recidivism is a public safety issue.”

Senator Raoul discussed his time in Springfield and the nature of politics in regards to “smart on crime” legislation. In particular, he mentioned the difficulty politicians face when trying to figure out what to do with aging correctional facilities.

Noting the dependency of some downstate communities on prisons as a source for jobs, Senator Raoul said “We [politicians] need to find a way of engaging to create economic opportunities for other people around the state that are not dependent on the prisons.” He went on to add, “The hardest thing for a politician to do is close a prison.”

Prior to Senator Raoul’s speech, a panel including Chicago Metropolitan 2020’s Mary Ann Dyar, Protestants for the Common Good’s Walter Boyd, and Tom Grippando of the Public Defender’s Office discussed the reentry legislative highlights of 2009.

Dyar focused on the CLEAR initiative, which provided a greater understanding of the current criminal justice system in hopes of fostering support of more aligned and consistent practices that are more transparent for the general public. She discussed the Crime Reduction Act, which relies on evidence-based practices and the conducting of risk assessments to determine the best possible reentry scenarios for each inmate. She also spoke on the Sentencing Policy Advisory Council, which looked at trends in

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Sheridan job fair helps clients cultivate market prior to release

Like at most events of its kind, the Sheridan Correctional Center’s “A Brighter Tomorrow Starting Today” job fair featured a number of interested candidates buzzing from table to table, eagerly receiving information from potential employers.

The only difference with this event, however, was that all of the applicants are still incarcerated with up to three months remaining on their sentences at Illinois’ innovative treatment-based drug prison. Instead of gathering information for immediate employment, the inmates made connections that could prove helpful when they reach their release dates.

“This is an important pre-release event,” said Shalanda Rabadan, Safer Foundation’s Interim Program Manager at Sheridan. “Some of the guys never had this in mind, so when they come here they can find something to look forward to when they get out.”

In order for an inmate to attend the job fair, he had to meet a certain set of requirements. First, his release date must be in the allotted time frame after the event. He also needed to obtain

a letter of recommendation from Jessica Neu, the Sheridan program’s Lead Job Coach. In order to receive this letter, an inmate must have completed or be currently enrolled in a vocational program and have received a “Significantly Surpasses” rating in a job evaluation conducted by Safer in conjunction with the client’s supervisor.

As a reward for attaining each of these requirements, clients earn the right to meet with a number of employers, staffing agencies, and faith-based institutions from around the state.



At the Sheridan Correctional Center’s “A Brighter Tomorrow Starting Today” career fair, clients were able to peruse job possibilities.

For visiting employers, meeting clients and viewing the Sheridan program left a positive impression.

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Friendship formed inside benefits both outside

When Jonathan Allen arrived at Sheridan Correctional Center, he figured he was merely fulfilling his destiny. Growing up on Chicago's West Side, Allen was one of 15 siblings, all but one had at least some involvement with the criminal justice system.

With a serious drug addiction and little more than an eighth grade education, Allen assumed that when he left Sheridan he would go back to his old neighborhood and within a few months be back in prison, or worse.

"Before I was incarcerated I was doing terribly," Allen said. "I was selling drugs and living in abandoned buildings. I was selling not to make money, but to support my habit."

While at Sheridan, however, Allen found an unlikely mentor who would help him change his life forever. A fellow inmate, Erick Williams, took Allen under his wing and the two quickly developed a close friendship.

"When I met Jonathan at Sheridan, we were living in the same housing unit," Williams said. "We were both from the West Side and I saw that he just needed an opportunity and some guidance."

Assuming the role of an older brother figure, Williams insisted that Allen find him upon release.

"I told him I wanted him to follow me wherever I went," Williams said. "I got out in August that year and he got out a week later. We both went to Jack Clark's Family Recovering Community in Rockford." Born and raised in Chicago, Allen was apprehensive at the thought of reentering

into unfamiliar surroundings in Rockford. The key to his decision lay in the mutual respect between him and Williams.

"Erick was always a man of his word," Allen said of Williams. "He did what he said he would do, and not many guys do that. I didn't want to go to Rockford, but I wanted to be a man of my word. When I told my counselor at Sheridan, he said it would be the best decision I ever made."

Upon arriving in Rockford, Allen discovered that finding a job would be a difficult task. He sought help from

Safer Foundation in Rockford and though he eventually found work as a dishwasher, Allen had to learn a lesson in patience.

"That whole experience was crazy," Allen said. "It took a while to get my state ID, let alone a job. I used to have to bring the applications home and have Erick show me how to fill them out."

When he wasn't working, Allen concentrated on his education. With Williams in his corner, Allen studied and eventually earned his GED.

"That was a big obstacle for me," Allen said. "The math was really kicking my butt, but Erick told me not to give up and to look at how far I had come. When I finally got my GED, I was pretty shocked. I didn't believe it until my certificate came in my mailbox and I had it in my hand."

For more details on the success of Jonathan Allen and his dear friend Erick Williams, read the full story at www.saferfoundation.org.



Erick Williams, left, and Jonathan Allen became friends at Sheridan Correctional Center and both moved to Rockford upon release.

Safer Sound Bytes

Safer employees donate their time during Day of Caring – On January 27, United Way's Day of Caring, 13 Davenport Youth Empowerment Program students and staff participated in folding and boxing 2,100 t-shirts at the Mississippi Valley Regional Blood Center in Bettendorf, Iowa. The shirts will be distributed at upcoming blood drives to be held in high schools all across western Illinois. In Chicago, Safer Foundation staff members, led by Kessa Jones, spent the Day of Caring at the Carole Robertson Center. They met the children in the classrooms and worked on special projects and games. The center supports literacy and other collaborative activities for infants through adulthood.

Safer Return clients impress Chicago Loop Alliance on State Street – On January 21, Safer Foundation made a presentation before the Loop Alliance, which is comprised of property owners and commissioners that manage the State Street Corridor. Safer Return clients are maintaining this area under the direction of Work Crew Supervisor Juan Cruz. The Loop's Board commended Safer Foundation for doing an excellent job on keeping State Street clean.

Russell-Green takes initiative; keeps Harvey clients involved – Heidi Russell-Green, Retention Specialist for the Transitional Employment Program (TEP) Harvey Employment and Learning Center, has had success in cultivating Safer Foundation mission in reducing recidivism. She not only met her enrollment benchmarks for the first quarter of this year, but she also spearheaded the site's Toys for Tots campaign. She also facilitated the 40-hour Job Readiness Curriculum for all 75 of the participants in the TEP program and further assisted those participants in the Basic Skills classroom.

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sentencing and corrections and reported its findings to policymakers, community organizations, and judges.

Grippando talked about the effort to suspend Medicaid benefits for incarcerated individuals instead of terminating them, which is the current practice. Boyd finished by talking about Senate Bill 1050, which allows better access to professional certificates for people with felony convictions (less than a Class X felony).

Later in the day, the “Law Enforcement Perspective on Making Smart-on-Crime Policy” panel featured Illinois State Representative Dennis Reboletti, Chief Eugene Williams of the Chicago Police Department, Assistant U.S. Attorney Nancy De Podesta, and Assistant State’s Attorney Jeanne Wrenn. De Podesta and Wrenn spoke about

their respective agency’s efforts to help reentry programs while maintaining victims’ interests. De Podesta talked about the importance of Project Safe Neighborhoods, an initiative spearheaded by the U.S. District Attorney’s office.

“Prosecution, while it has a function and purpose, is not the answer to youth gun violence,” she said. “We have social service providers like Safer Foundation that are routinely there to help out with our reentry forums. Parolees have an opportunity at these forums to go and speak with providers. We have seen 30 percent less recidivism for forum attendees.”



Illinois State Representative Dennis Reboletti, left, speaks during a roundtable discussion while Assistant State’s Attorney Jeanne Wrenn, center, and Assistant U.S. Attorney Nancy De Podesta look on at the 8th Annual CARRE Policy Conference at the UIC Forum.

Chief Williams gave an impassioned plea to help provide services to individuals before it becomes a law enforcement issue.

“When all social institutions fail, their problems become our problems,” he said. “We have to look at what we can do when these individuals are coming back. I would like to see a mandatory education requirement instituted as a condition of parole, and I would like to see all the laws preventing those who were incarcerated from having basic jobs addressed.

We also need a sincere commitment on the part of big business, small business, state, local, and federal governments to provide assistance in the forms of jobs.”

Congressman Reboletti spoke of his experience as a prosecutor and how that helped him when he approached SB 1050.

“I never thought I’d spend so much time on a bill like this,” he said. “But Michael (Sweig, Safer Foundation Public Policy Liaison) was camped out in my office and we worked to get something done.”

At the onset of the program, Safer Foundation President and CEO Diane Williams presented the Safer Foundation Visionary Award to six individuals: Senator Raoul, State Representative Barbara Flynn Currie, Prisoner Review Board Chairman Jorge Montes, Eileen Subak of the League of Women Voters, TASC’s Benneth Lee, and Safer Foundation’s Raphael Ward.

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“As a pastor, I’ve been to a number of prisons, and I haven’t seen any kind of training programs to the extent that they have here,” said Pastor Cliff Parks of Heaven’s View Christian Fellowship in Peoria. “Most are 23 hours in a cell and one out. This kind of programming allows the guys to make contacts within the facility so that when they go out they know they already have people out there to help them. If there isn’t something in place when they walk out the door, they’ll go right back to what they were doing before.”

Another important aspect of the job fair was that it helped employers foster new relationships with Safer Foundation. It also gave them opportunities to interact with an eager group of workers who might perfectly fit the needs of their organizations.

“It’s a two-edged sword,” said Jamie Skermont, owner of Pug Dog’s Diner in Rockford. “It’s a learning experience for me because it helps me see what kind of people are out there. And it also opens the door for me to use Safer Foundation and its clients later if I decide to expand my business.”

Volunteer Spotlight: Class requirement leads to internship opportunity

Danica Deming is currently a senior, majoring in sociology at DePaul University. She became interested in Safer Foundation while taking a criminal justice class at her school. As a course requirement, Danica completed her service learning experience at Safer. She enjoyed volunteering so much that she later decided to stay and fulfill her degree program's internship requirement.

Since April, Danica has been assisting clients with things such as setting up e-mail accounts, writing resumes, and online job searches.

She has gained much insight on the population we serve, stating that



Danica Deming

“Being here for a while has definitely helped me learn how to help them. The clients know me by name, and I’m better able to help them now than I was before.”

While Danica’s volunteer experience has been very helpful to Safer’s staff and clients, it has also been a great learning experience.

“I wasn’t really exposed to this client population before, but now I have a general knowledge of the issues they face and the government policies addressing those issues,” she said.



Catalyst is published four times a year by the Safer Foundation. Questions or comments regarding this publication may be addressed to: info@saferfoundation.org.

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