

What You Need to Know about President Obama's Plans for Criminal Justice Reform

The Big Topics



Clemency

Building on his commitment to address instances of unfairness in sentencing, President Obama has commuted the sentences of more men and woman than the past six presidents combined. Commutations underscore the President's commitment to using all the tools at his disposal to bring greater fairness and equity to our justice system. To further this progress, the President has established a clemency initiative to encourage individuals who were sentenced under outdated laws and policies to petition for commutation.

LEARN MORE:

- [President Obama has commuted the sentences of 248 individuals.](#)
- [Read the President's letter to all clemency recipients. \(PDF\)](#)
- [Watch the President talk about commuting sentences.](#)
- [Learn more about the clemency initiative.](#)



Solitary:

The United States is a nation of second chances, but the experience of solitary confinement too often undercuts that second chance. Solitary confinement is increasingly overused with heartbreaking results – which is why the President directed the Attorney General to review the overused of solitary confinement across U.S. prisons. In response to that review, the President banned solitary confinement for juveniles and as a response to low-level infractions in the federal prison system, expanded treatment for the mentally ill, and increased the amount of time inmates in solitary in federal prisons can spend outside of their cells.

LEARN MORE:

- [Read the President's Op-Ed on why we must rethink solitary confinement.](#)
- [Read the Presidential Memorandum Limiting the Use of Restrictive Housing by the Federal Government](#)
- [Read the Department of Justice Report on solitary confinement](#)



Policing:

“I reject any narrative that seeks to divide police and communities that they serve.” -President Obama, 10/27/15, 122nd Annual IACP Conference.

The Administration is committed to strengthening community policing and trust among law enforcement officers and the communities they serve and has invested more than \$2 billion to retain or hire 10,000 police officers. Among other initiatives, the President created the Task Force on 21st Century Policing to develop a blueprint for building trust between law enforcement and communities, and the White House launched the Police Data Initiative.

LEARN MORE:

- [Read the report and learn more about the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing.](#)
- [Is your community part of the Police Data Initiative?](#)
- [Learn more about the Administration’s work to make communities stronger and safer.](#)



Reentry

Each year, more than 600,000 individuals are released from state and federal prisons. Advancing policies and programs that enable these men and women to put their lives back on track and earn their second chance promotes justice, fairness, and public safety.

LEARN MORE:

- [Read about the Administration's work to ensure formerly incarcerated individuals can successfully reintegrate into their communities.](#)
- [Learn more about what you can do and sign the Fair Chance Business Pledge](#)
- [Watch President Obama visit El Reno Federal Correctional Institution, the first visit to a federal prison by a sitting President.](#)



Violent Crime

Over the last 20 years, police have helped cut the violent crime rate and the homicide rate in America by almost half. The Administration continues to work with state and local law enforcement agencies to enhance public safety.

LEARN MORE:

- [Learn about the Violence Reduction Network, linking police departments with federal resources in some of the country's most violence cities.](#)
- [Read about the National Forum on Youth Violence, designed to reduce youth violence and gang activity.](#)

FACT SHEET: President Obama Announces New Actions to Promote Rehabilitation and Reintegration for the Formerly- Incarcerated

This Administration has consistently taken steps to make our criminal justice system fairer and more effective and to address the vicious cycle of poverty, criminality, and incarceration that traps too many Americans and weakens too many communities. Today, in Newark, New Jersey, President Obama will continue to promote these goals by highlighting the reentry process of formerly-incarcerated individuals and announce new actions aimed at helping Americans who've paid their debt to society rehabilitate and reintegrate back into their communities.

Each year, more than 600,000 individuals are released from state and federal prisons. Advancing policies and programs that enable these men and women to put their lives back on track and earn their second chance promotes not only justice and fairness, but also public safety. That is why this Administration has taken a series of concrete actions to reduce the challenges and barriers that the formerly incarcerated confront, including through the work of the Federal Interagency Reentry Council, a cabinet-level working group to support the federal government's efforts to promote public safety and economic opportunity through purposeful cross-agency coordination and collaboration.

The President has also called on Congress to pass meaningful criminal justice reform, including reforms that reduce recidivism for those who have been in prison and are reentering society. The Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015, which recently received a strong bipartisan vote in the Senate Judiciary Committee, would be an important step forward in this effort, by providing new incentives and opportunities for those incarcerated to participate in the type of evidence-based treatment and training and other programs proven to reduce recidivism, promote successful reentry, and help eliminate barriers to economic opportunity following release. By reducing overlong sentences for nonviolent drug offenses, the bill would also free up additional

resources for investments in other public safety initiatives, including reentry services, programs for mental illness and addiction, and state and local law enforcement.

Today, the President is pleased to announce the following measures to help promote rehabilitation and reintegration:

- **Adult Reentry Education Grants.** The Department of Education will award up to \$8 million (over 3 years) to 9 communities for the purpose of supporting educational attainment and reentry success for individuals who have been incarcerated. This grant program seeks to build evidence on effective reentry education programs and demonstrate that high-quality, appropriately designed, integrated, and well-implemented educational and related services in institutional and community settings are critical in supporting educational attainment and reentry success.
- **Arrests Guidance for Public and other HUD-Assisted Housing.** The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) will release guidance today to Public Housing Authorities and owners of HUD-assisted housing regarding the use of arrests in determining who can live in HUD-assisted properties. This Guidance will also clarify the Department's position on "one strike" policies and will include best practices from Public Housing Authorities.
- **Banning the Box in Federal Employment.** The President has called on Congress to follow a growing number of states, cities, and private companies that have decided to "ban the box" on job applications. We are encouraged that Congress is considering bipartisan legislation that would "ban the box" for federal hiring and hiring by federal contractors. In the meantime, the President is directing the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to take action where it can by modifying its rules to delay inquiries into criminal history until later in the hiring process. While most agencies already have taken this step, this action will better ensure that applicants from all segments of society, including those with prior criminal histories, receive a fair opportunity to compete for Federal employment.
- **TechHire: Expanding tech training and jobs for individuals with criminal records.** As a part of President Obama's TechHire initiative, over 30 communities are taking action – working with each other and national employers – to expand access to tech jobs for more Americans with fast track training like coding boot camps and new recruitment and placement strategies. Today we are announcing the following new commitments:
 - Memphis, TN and New Orleans, LA are expanding TechHire programs to support people with criminal records.
 - Newark, NJ, working with the New Jersey Institute of Technology and employers like Audible, Panasonic, and Prudential, will offer training through the Art of Code program in software development with a focus on training and placement for formerly incarcerated people.
 - New Haven, CT, Justice Education Center, New Haven Works, and others will launch a pilot program to train and place individuals with criminal records, and will start a program to train incarcerated people in tech programming skills.
 - Washington, DC partners will train and place 200 formerly incarcerated people in tech jobs. They will engage IT companies to develop and/or review modifications to hiring processes that can be made for individuals with a criminal record.
- **Establishing a National Clean Slate Clearinghouse.** In the coming weeks, the Department of Labor and Department of Justice will partner to establish a National Clean Slate Clearinghouse to provide technical assistance to local legal aid programs, public defender offices, and reentry service providers to build capacity for legal services needed to help with record-cleaning, expungement, and related civil legal services.

- **Permanent Supportive Housing for the Reentry Population through Pay for Success.** The Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Bureau of Justice Assistance at the Department of Justice have launched an \$8.7 million demonstration grant to address homelessness and reduce recidivism among the justice-involved population. The Pay for Success (PFS) Permanent Supportive Housing Demonstration will test cost-effective ways to help persons cycling between the criminal justice and homeless service systems, while making new Permanent Supportive Housing available for the reentry population. PFS is an innovative form of performance contracting for the social sector through which government only pays if results are achieved. This grant will support the design and launch of PFS programs to reduce both homelessness and jail days, saving funds to criminal justice and safety net systems.
- **Juvenile Reentry Assistance Program Awards to Support Public Housing Residents.** With funding provided by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention at the Department of Justice, the Department of Housing and Urban Development will provide \$1.75 million to aid eligible public housing residents who are under the age of 25 to expunge or seal their records in accordance with their applicable state laws. In addition, the National Bar Association – the nation’s oldest and largest national association of predominantly African-American lawyers and judges – has committed to supplementing this program with 4,000 hours of pro bono legal services. Having a criminal record can result in major barriers to securing a job and other productive opportunities in life, and this program will enable young people whose convictions are expungable to start over.

Many of the announcements being made today stem from the President’s My Brother’s Keeper Task Force, which is charged with addressing persistent opportunity gaps facing boys and young men of color and ensuring all young people can reach their full potential. In May of 2014, the Task Force provided the President with a series of evidence-based recommendations focused on the six key milestones on the path to adulthood that are especially predictive of later success, and where interventions can have the greatest impact, including Reducing Violence and Providing a Second Chance. The Task Force, made up of key agencies across the Federal Government, has made considerable progress towards implementing their recommendations, many times creating partnerships across agencies and sectors. Today’s announcements respond to a wide range of recommendations designed to “eliminate unnecessary barriers to giving justice-involved youth a second chance.”

These announcements mark a continuation of the Obama Administration’s commitment to mitigating unnecessary collateral impacts of incarceration. In particular, the Administration has advanced numerous effective reintegration strategies through the work of the Federal Interagency Reentry Council, whose mission is to reduce recidivism and victimization; assist those returning from prison, jail or juvenile facilities to become productive citizens; and save taxpayer dollars by lowering the direct and collateral costs of incarceration.

Through the Reentry Council and other federal agency initiatives, the Administration has improved rehabilitation and reintegration opportunities in meaningful ways, including recent initiatives in the following areas:

Reducing barriers to employment.

Last month, the Department of Justice awarded \$3 million to provide technology-based career training for incarcerated adults and juveniles. These funds will be used to establish and provide career training programs during the 6-24 month period before release from a prison, jail, or juvenile facility with connections to follow-up career services after release in the community.

The Department of Justice also announced the selection of its first-ever Second Chance Fellow, Daryl Atkinson. Recognizing that many of those directly impacted by the criminal justice system hold significant insight into reforming the justice system, this position was designed to bring in a person who is both a leader in the criminal justice field and a formerly incarcerated individual to work as a colleague to the Reentry Council and as an advisor to the Bureau of Justice Assistance Second Chance programs.

In addition, the Department of Labor awarded a series of grants in June that are aimed at reducing employment barriers, including:

- **Face Forward:** The Department awarded \$30.5 million in grants to provide services to youth, aged 14 to 24, who have been involved in the juvenile justice system. Face Forward gives youth a second chance to succeed in the workforce by removing the stigma of having a juvenile record through diversion and/or expungement strategies.
- **Linking to Employment Activities Pre-Release (LEAP):** The Department awarded \$10 million in pilot grants for programs that place One Stop Career Center/American Job Centers services directly in local jails. These specialized services will prepare individuals for employment while they are incarcerated to increase their opportunities for successful reentry.
- **Training to Work:** The Department awarded \$27.5 million in Training to Work grants to help strengthen communities where formerly incarcerated individuals return. Training to Work provides workforce-related reentry opportunities for returning citizens, aged 18 and older, who are participating in state and/or local work-release programs. The program focuses on training opportunities that lead to industry-recognized credentials and job opportunities along career pathways.

Increasing access to education and enrichment.

High-quality correctional education — including postsecondary correctional education — has been shown to measurably reduce re-incarceration rates. In July, the Departments of Education and Justice announced the Second Chance Pell Pilot Program to allow incarcerated Americans to receive Pell Grants to pursue postsecondary education and trainings that can help them turn their lives around and ultimately, get jobs, and support their families. Since this pilot was announced, over 200 postsecondary institutions across the nation have applied for consideration.

In June, the Small Business Administration published a final rule for the Microloan Program that provides more flexibility to SBA non-profit intermediaries and expands the pool of microloan recipients. The change will make small businesses that have an owner who is currently on probation or parole eligible for microloan programs, aiding individuals who face significant barriers to traditional employment to reenter the workforce.

Expanding opportunities for justice-involved youth to serve their communities.

In October, the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention at the Department of Justice announced a new round of Youth Opportunity AmeriCorps grants aimed at enrolling at-risk and formerly incarcerated youth in national service projects. These grants, which include \$1.2 million in AmeriCorps funding, will enable 211 AmeriCorps members to serve through organizations in Washington, D.C. and four states: Maine, Maryland, New York, and Texas.

In addition, the Department of Labor partnered with the Department of Defense's National Guard Youth Challenge program and awarded three \$4 million grants in April of this year to provide court-involved youth with work experiences, mentors, and vocational skills training that prepares them for successful entry into the workforce.

Increasing access to health care and public services.

In October, the Department of Justice announced \$6 million in awards under the Second Chance Act to support reentry programming for adults with co-occurring substance abuse and mental disorders. This funding is aimed at increasing the screening and assessment that takes place during incarceration as well as improving the provision of treatment options.

In September, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) at HHS announced the winners of its reintegration toolkit challenge to develop software applications aimed at transforming existing resources into user-friendly tools with the potential to promote successful reentry and reduce recidivism. And in October, HHS issued a "*Guide for Incarcerated Parents with Children in the Child Welfare System*" in order to help incarcerated parents who have children in the child welfare system, including in out-of-home-care, better understand how the child welfare system works so that they can stay in touch." The information can be found at: <http://youth.gov/youth-topics/children-of-incarcerated-parents>.

The Social Security Administration (SSA) finalized written statewide prerelease agreements in September with the Department of Corrections in Iowa and Kansas. These agreements – now covering the majority of states – ensure continuity of services for returning citizens. SSA also has prisoner SSN replacement card MOUs in place with 39 states and the Federal Bureau of Prisons. A dedicated reentry webpage is accessible at www.socialsecurity.gov/reentry.

Increasing reentry service access to incarcerated veterans.

In September, the Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service announced the award of \$1.5 million in grants to help once incarcerated veterans considered "at risk" of becoming homeless. In all, seven grants will serve more than 650 formerly incarcerated veterans in six states.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) also has developed a web-based system – the Veterans Reentry Search Service (VRSS) – that allows prison, jail, and court staff to quickly and accurately identify veterans among their populations. The system also prompts VA field staff – automatically – so that they can efficiently connect veterans with services. As of this summer,

more than half of all state prison systems, and a growing number of local jails, are now using VRSS to identify veterans in their populations.

Improving opportunities for children of incarcerated parents and their families.

In October, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) took action to make it easier for incarcerated individuals to stay in touch with their families by capping all in-state and interstate prison phone rates. The FCC also put an end to most of the fees imposed by inmate calling service providers. Studies have consistently shown that inmates who maintain contact with their families experience better outcomes and are less likely to return to prison after they are released. Reduced phone rates will make calls significantly more affordable for inmates and their families, including children of incarcerated parents, who often live in poverty and were at times charged \$14 per minute phone rates.

In October, the Department of Justice announced new grant awards to fund mentoring services for incarcerated fathers who are returning to their families. These awards will fund mentoring and comprehensive transitional services that emphasize development of parenting skills in incarcerated young fathers.

Moreover, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention at the Department of Justice has awarded \$1 million to promote and expand services to children who have a parent who is incarcerated in a Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) correctional facility. This program aims to provide opportunities for positive youth development, and to identify effective strategies and best practices that support children of incarcerated parents, including mentoring and comprehensive services that facilitate healthy and positive relationships. In addition to engaging the parent while he or she is incarcerated, this solicitation also supports the delivery of transitional reentry services upon release.

Private Sector Commitments to Support Reentry.

The Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO), an organization that provides comprehensive employment services to people with recent criminal convictions, has committed to more than double the number of people served from 4,500 to 11,000 across existing geographies and 3-5 new states. This winter, CEO will open in San Jose with support from Google and in the next year, the team will launch in Los Angeles. This growth has been catalyzed by federal investments, including support from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the Social Innovation Fund, and a Department of Labor Pay for Success Project.

In addition, Cengage Learning will roll out Smart Horizons Career Online Education in correctional facilities in up to four new states over the next 12 months, providing over 1,000 new students with the opportunity to earn a high-school diploma and/or career certificate online. Smart Horizons Career Online Education is the world's first accredited online school district, with a focus on reaching underserved populations. The program has been piloted in Florida with 428 students who have received diplomas or certificates.