Fact Sheet
Employers’ Rejection of People with Criminal Records Is Putting a Large Percentage of the Population Out of Work Unnecessarily

Fact #1: Growing numbers of people have criminal records.

- According to the U.S. Department of Justice, there were about 100 million people with criminal records in the United States as of December 2008.¹
- Pennsylvania has the 8th highest corrections population in the country (including people on probation and parole). Although the state’s crime rate is 24% lower than the national average, its corrections population is 23% higher than the national average.²
- Minorities are much more likely than whites to have criminal records. Nationally, African Americans are incarcerated in federal or state prison at 4.5 times the rate of Whites. In Pennsylvania, this disparity is markedly worse: there are 11.1 African Americans and 6.0 Hispanics in federal or state prison for every White prisoner.³
- More than twice as many people are on probation or parole than are incarcerated.⁴

Fact #2: It is harder than ever for people with criminal records to find work.

- Criminal records are more accessible than ever, from the State Police, criminal court records (now available on the internet), and hundreds of background check companies.
- According to a 2009 survey of the Society of Human Resources Management, 92% of their members perform criminal background checks on some or all jobs (up from 51% in 1996).⁵
- Studies in Milwaukee⁶ and Los Angeles⁷ show that employers are refusing to hire people with criminal records, even for entry level jobs.
- The list of legal restrictions prohibiting the employment of people with criminal records is large and continues to grow. In Pennsylvania, there are at least 55 occupations in which some people with criminal records are barred, from accountants through veterinarians.⁸

Fact #3: After several years without another conviction, a person with a criminal record is little more likely to offend than a person without a criminal record.

- After 6 or 7 years, a person with a criminal record presents little more risk than a non-offender.⁹


Prepared by Sharon M. Dietrich

*Community Legal Services, Inc., 1424 Chestnut St., Philadelphia, PA 19102*

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