

BILL OF RIGHTS FOR CRIMINALIZED WORKERS

THE NEW STANDARD OF ECONOMIC JUSTICE

#WORKINGfuture

A campaign led by JLUSA

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Over 70 million people in the United States have a criminal record. For people living with a record, their punishment is not limited to the court's sentence. A criminal record can produce a lifetime of barriers and exclusions which are often called "collateral consequences." Voter disenfranchisement, loss of housing and healthcare, disruption of or lack of access to education, and discriminatory hiring practices have created the need for the #WORKINGfuture campaign.

#WORKINGfuture is an economic justice campaign to restore the civil and human rights of people with records and formerly incarcerated people:

We demand a new "Bill of Rights" for workers with criminal records founded on the following principles:

- 1. The Right to Dignity:** Honoring the historic "Open Letter to Our Friends on the Question of Language" by Eddie Ellis, people with records, including those that have experienced prison, have the right to identify with "people-first" language rather than dehumanizing language that attempts to define them forever based on system-involvement. Safe communities and workplaces must not tolerate stigma or dehumanizing language like "felons," "inmates," "convicts," or "ex-cons." People prefer to be referred to by their names, or if the conversation is related to system-involvement, acceptable terms include: "returning neighbor," "formerly incarcerated person," "people with records," etc.
- 2. The Right to Earn a Living Wage:** Minimum-wage jobs can exacerbate economic insecurity and add to the financial instability of entire communities. All workers have a right to earn a wage that allows them to support themselves and their families, and to build economic mobility. A living wage should not be predicated on working several jobs that cobbled together allow for basic economic survival. It is only through the construction of safe and healthy communities that we can ensure neighborhoods with a strong foundation of dignity, respect, and better outcomes for all. Safety and security are achieved generationally. Communities targeted by failed criminal justice policy have been denied the ability to build that security.
- 3. The Right to Education and Access to Technology:** The restructuring of the labor force after de-industrialization and the subsequent technological revolutions manifest skill gaps for people returning from prisons. Despite that the fastest growing sectors of the economy require an occupational license or technology-based skills, incarcerated people are routinely denied access to quality, high-level education and tech skills, and even the most basic computer skills. Quality education and skills training should be accessible and affordable for all.

4. **The Right to Real Employment Opportunity: The exploitation of people experiencing poverty and of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated labor must end.** Structural discrimination against people with records is built into every stage of the hiring and job process. This has led to endemic unemployment and a culture of blame and shame toward targeted communities. This discrimination inhibits the ability of formerly incarcerated people to feed, clothe and house their families. When a job is denied to someone solely because of a criminal conviction, it adds unofficial and unseen years to a person's sentence, while perpetuating stigmatization and denying access to stability and mobility. The economic impact is felt not just by individuals, but by entire communities.
5. **The Right to a Safe Workplace:** A criminal record should not force individuals to take jobs where their safety and security are compromised. Formerly incarcerated and convicted workers should have the same protections regarding fair wages, robust benefits, and working hours, as well access to sick leave and vacation time. All workers should be free to work in conditions that are safe and conducive to their physical and mental health.
6. **The Right to Free Speech and Collective Organizing:** Formerly incarcerated and convicted workers are too often silenced for fear of losing jobs that were nearly impossible to get in the first place. Too many workers fear critiquing the culture of the workplace or speaking out against ongoing discriminatory practices. Workers have the right to speak up and speak truth without the threat of being fired. Free speech and expression are also vital to union organizing. The labor movement and unions must make efforts to engage and organize workers with records. Unionized workforces must build non-discrimination clauses into their collective bargaining agreements that explicitly protect workers with records.
7. **The Right to Affordable and Stable Housing:** Safe and secure housing is a fundamental human right. The mark of a criminal record enhances an individual's housing instability because of legal and extralegal discrimination, as well as concurrent unemployment and insufficient subsidies. Homelessness should not be the primary or sole option for people returning from incarceration. We demand that landlords end all legal and illegal discriminatory practices against people with criminal records. Adverse housing actions cannot be taken solely because of the presence of a criminal record.
8. **The Right to Affordable Transportation:** Working people increasingly face barriers to accessing affordable and reliable transportation. Low-income neighborhoods suffer from a lack of transportation infrastructure, forcing many formerly incarcerated workers to face one to two hour commutes to get to work. This is unacceptable. The right to transportation is a human right. We demand reliable access to dependable and affordable transportation.
9. **The Right to Affordable Childcare:** Another barrier to employment is the lack of safe and affordable childcare, which can be even harder for parents to find after incarceration. For women, in particular, employment opportunities are

jeopardized when they cannot afford childcare because of laws that deny public assistance to individuals with drug felonies. These barriers must be eliminated so everyone has the ability to find childcare.

10. **The Right to Healing:** Formerly incarcerated workers must be supported with healthcare that includes mental health support and preventive health services. People that have been subjected to the trauma of prison and stigma of having a record must be able to access services that support their reintegration into society as well as healing for themselves and their families.