

Georgia Roundtable on Employment and Individuals with Criminal Records

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Employment Working Group, a group of Georgia-based service providers and government organizations, hosted an employer roundtable at Georgia-Pacific on September 29th, 2017. The event brought together legal representatives, HR directors, and hiring managers from a wide range of Georgia-based employers to examine the issue of hiring individuals with a criminal record.

The objectives were to discuss the benefits of hiring individuals with a criminal record, to learn about the barriers discouraging employers from hiring those individuals, and to discuss policies that would encourage employers to consider candidates with a criminal record.

To frame the conversation, Doug Ammar of Georgia Justice Project presented on the business case for hiring individuals with a record and Cinda Herndon-King of Atlanta CareerRise presented on Georgia's labor demand.

Our discussions yielded the following insights:

CURRENT PRACTICES

1. **Top Considerations:** When considering an applicant with a record, many employers place emphasis on: an applicant's honesty about their criminal history, time passed since their last interaction with the justice system, relevance of their charge to the position, efforts at rehabilitation, involvement in programs and support networks.
2. **Communication:** Most employers stated a need for education on strategies for "managing up and down." Many are unsure how to discuss the topic of hiring individuals with a record with company leadership, hiring managers, and other employees.
3. **Reputation:** The majority of employers shared that their greatest concern regarding hiring individuals with a record is the public's perception and the risk it may pose to their brand or reputation.

POLICY

1. **Expand Protections and Incentives:** While there are currently some protections and incentives for hiring individuals with criminal records, the scope of these protections and incentives should be expanded and there should be renewed efforts to increase employer awareness of the opportunities they present.
2. **Increase Vetting Mechanisms:** There is a preference for applicants who have been 'vetted' by another party. This makes the hire feel less risky, and in some cases decreases their liability.
 - Employers stated that applicants with a criminal record found through a reputable program or staffing agency are more attractive. They have a seal of approval and often ongoing support.
 - A large number of employers expressed a strong support for a mechanism to expunge certain convictions in Georgia. If a judge grants expungement to an individual, they have essentially 'vetted' the individual's reintegration into the community. There would then be

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less of a need for the employer to know about this record, which diminishes their worries about liability and the flow of information within staff.

Attendees' Reactions

From an exit survey distributed at the end of the event:

- **65%** of attendees walked away with a more positive view of hiring individuals with criminal records
- **89%** of attendees stated that they would review their company's use of incentives and protections
- **96%** would support further policy change to reduce barriers to hiring individuals with criminal histories

Roundtable Attendees

Collier Metals, DeKalb Medical, Delta Air Lines, Dentons, Emory University, Empire Distributors, Enterprise Rent-a-Car, Evergreen Corporation, Fisher & Phillips LLP, Georgia-Pacific, Georgia Restaurant Association, Gregory B. Levett and Sons Funeral Home, The Home Depot, MailChimp, Mercedes-Benz Stadium, National Association of African Americans in Human Resources-Atlanta, Nancy's Chicago Pizza, Next Step Staffing Solutions, Parker Hudson Rainer & Dobbs LLP, Russell Landscape Group, Tip Top Poultry, UPS, Waffle House

Employment Working Group Members

Aerotropolis Collective, Atlanta CareerRise, Georgia Center for Opportunity, Georgia Department of Community Supervision, Georgia Department of Corrections, Georgia Justice Project, Georgia Works!, Goodwill of North Georgia, The Center for Working Families, National Incarceration Association, U.S. Attorney's Office - Northern District of Georgia, Urban League of Greater Atlanta, WorkSource GA

Currently excluded from many job prospects, justice-involved individuals are a valuable and underutilized resource for employers in need of qualified candidates. For more information, see our "Business Case Fact Sheet."

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