

Baltimore Citywide Ex-offender Task Force Report and Recommendations

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Baltimore Citywide Ex-offender Task Force Report and Recommendations

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Executive Summary

With an estimated 9,000 people leaving the Maryland prison system and returning to Baltimore City annually, the task of assisting all of these individuals in finding jobs has surfaced as a challenge that requires significant attention and full-scale community support. To address this challenge, under the direction of Mayor Martin O'Malley, the Mayor's Office of Employment Development (MOED) facilitated the creation of the Baltimore Citywide Ex-offender Task Force (EOTF) in October 2002. Today, the EOTF membership includes more than 100 government agencies, nonprofit and community-based service providers, major foundations, advocacy groups and faith leaders. This large group has dedicated itself to promoting change and enhancing and improving the scope of services delivered to Baltimore City's ex-offenders. Members' enthusiasm has kept ex-offender reentry and reintegration in front of policymakers, ensuring that they and other key stakeholders are fully apprised of the challenges that Baltimore faces and are actively engaged in identifying and implementing solutions.

Ex-offenders face formidable obstacles in the reentry process. Chief among these is getting, maintaining, and advancing in a job. They must also overcome other significant barriers, ranging from the need for substance abuse treatment to obtaining affordable housing, in order to successfully reintegrate into society. As the magnitude and diversity of the problem areas emerged during the EOTF's monthly meetings, it became clear that ex-offender reentry – and employment - hinged on removing immediate barriers such as the need for photo identification, temporary housing and health treatment. The EOTF learned, furthermore, that ex-offenders are often barred from most federally funded needs-based programs and cannot legally reside in public housing. Further exacerbating the situation, area businesses are reluctant to hire ex-offenders, and job openings matching their low educational attainment and skill levels are scarce.

Clearly, Baltimore's challenge is far greater than simply connecting ex-offenders to jobs. Not only must the City cope with the sheer volume of inmate releases, it must implement strategies to address ex-offenders' multiple, concurrent service needs. Given these circumstances, the EOTF concurred that a blueprint – a comprehensive action plan – was needed to guide the City's many partners in a coordinated approach to meeting the varied needs of Baltimore's ex-offender population. Of necessity, this action plan must include new and better interagency and organizational partnerships that simplify access to workforce development resources, promote cross referral to support services, and encourage focused attention and increased financial investment by the public and private sectors.

This report is the culmination of the fact-finding phase of the EOTF's work and represents the beginning of what must be a long-term commitment to address ex-offender reentry and reintegration issues. Included in this report are the major findings of the EOTF and its

Ex-offenders face formidable obstacles in the reentry process. More than 100 organizations have joined together as the Baltimore Citywide Ex-offender Task Force to promote change

consensus recommendations, which, when implemented, have the potential to improve reentry outcomes for a significant portion of Baltimore City's ex-offender population.

The EOTF firmly believes that a shared commitment to changing current practices and eliminating counter-productive policies and procedures will improve employment outcomes for ex-offenders. This has already been evidenced. Galvanized by the EOTF's work, Baltimore's service providers are now making conscious decisions to work together to confront the myriad of reentry challenges. Policy makers are now actively involved in initiating changes to ensure that each ex-offender can access the support and resources needed to find employment and build a successful new life. However, while progress is being made in these areas, much work remains to be done.

The EOTF's major findings and related recommendations are listed below. A detailed explanation of each is included in the body of the report.

Finding 1: *Inadequate resources exist to provide a comprehensive menu of services that remove barriers to employment and promote ex-offender job readiness.*

Education

Recommendation: Identify and assess those most in need; begin occupational training early and continue it throughout the period of incarceration.

Recommendation: Identify and assess those most in need; begin basic literacy and GED classes early and continue them throughout the period of incarceration.

Housing

Recommendation: Increase the number of transitional housing slots available in the City to accommodate the ex-offender population.

Health

Recommendation: Increase the substance abuse, mental health and health treatment services available to inmates and ex-offenders.

Recommendation: Address the attitudinal and personal issues of offenders before and during their transition.

Transitional Services

Recommendation: Develop, expand and formalize the referral process from the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services to employment and training providers serving ex-offenders.

Recommendation: Coordinate efforts with the Division of Corrections to ensure that existing procedures are followed so that ex-offenders can secure Social Security Cards, birth certificates and Maryland State Identification.

Recommendation: Create a Release Portfolio, to include appropriate identification documentation as well as referral information regarding available resources, to be given to each inmate about to leave custody.

Recommendation: Expand successful programs that provide transitional housing, mentoring, job skills upgrades and job placement services.

Recommendation: Increase the marketable skills of ex-offenders by providing the opportunity for occupational skills training through One-Stop Career Centers and other service providers.

Recommendation: Consolidate existing resources that are presently housed separately, and create a One-Stop Center for ex-offenders that provides a full menu of services, with an emphasis on employment.

Recommendation: Expand the Northwest One-Stop Career Center/Division of Parole and Probation model to other MOED One-Stops.

Recommendation: Increase the number of work release programs to assist low-risk, incarcerated individuals in getting the skills necessary to sustain long-term employment after release.

Recommendation: Promote employer engagement and expand the employer base to create more job opportunities for ex-offenders.

Recommendation: Make legal assistance available to ex-offenders seeking to expunge their misdemeanor records.

Recommendation: Develop a reintegration plan that taps the expertise of community- and faith-based organizations to provide behavior modification for returning offenders and family reunification services.

Finding 2: Minimal coordination exists among agencies and service organizations to ensure that ex-offenders are aware of, and have access to, available resources and services.

Data Exchange

Recommendation: Catalog, in a web-based system, available resources and programs serving ex-offenders throughout the City.

Recommendation: Create a user-friendly web page that links ex-offender service providers to MOED's web site and interfaces with the United Way's First Call for Help and Maryland's 2-1-1 systems.

Recommendation: Create a systematic approach to collecting usable data that validates return on investment in service areas to be identified and evaluated based on input from the Steering Committee.

Capacity Building

Recommendation: Formalize a process by which the providers and other organizations come together to exchange information.

Recommendation: Create a community- and faith-based mentorship program for ex-offenders.

Recommendation: Build capacity for organizations currently serving ex-offenders via (no-cost) training to be provided by the Maryland Institute for Employment and Training Professionals (MIETP).

Finding 3: Advocacy is needed to impact the numerous legislative areas that impede ex-offender employment.

Child Support

Recommendation: Promote legislation that allows for the suspension of child support obligations during the period of incarceration.

Expungement

Recommendation: Promote the possibility of expunging misdemeanor charges.

Employment

Recommendation: Promote legislation to increase funding for the City to increase front-end work release programs for low-risk incarcerated individuals.

Recommendation: Promote the employment of ex-offenders in municipal jobs.

With the publication of this report, Baltimore City’s ex-offender project moves into the next phase. The goal of this phase is to reengineer Baltimore’s reentry processes and create opportunities to proactively engage the ex-offender, matching needs and services to produce productive behaviors and skills that result in sustainable employment. In this phase, the governance and organizational structure will be defined by a Mayoral appointed Steering Committee that will meet regularly to define and formulate objectives, operationalize the goals, objectives and action agenda of each recommendation, create a roll out plan, and produce periodic reports detailing progress in key areas for review by City and State officials and other

stakeholders. Once formed the Steering Committee will be the direct conduit for conversation and dialogue with the Mayor.

Finally, the EOTF wishes to acknowledge Baltimore City's efforts to address issues surrounding juvenile offenders that return to Baltimore's communities and the capacity and accessibility of services available to them. Although it did not explore juvenile offenders' needs in any depth, the EOTF recognizes that this, too, is a pressing issue. However, the magnitude of challenges confronting the City with regard to the adult ex-offender population necessitates that the EOTF target their needs exclusively at this time, particularly since the City has established juvenile offender task forces and commissions to contend with juvenile reentry issues.

Preface

The crowd filling the lobby of the Northwest One-Stop Career Center grew still and silent as Bernard Brooks described the previous 30 days of his life – from laying on the floor of his prison cell trying to keep cool, to standing before a gathering alongside the Mayor and in front of television cameras, now a free man and gainfully employed. He described his pride in riding the bus to work, looking around at others and realizing he was just like these other people – on his way to a job.

Mr. Brooks spent 11 years of his life in prison for second-degree murder. Now married, and holding down two full-time jobs, he talked openly with Baltimore Mayor Martin O'Malley and other dignitaries at an event in May 2003 to announce an innovative partnership to support ex-offender employment. This new initiative places a job developer from the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services' (DPSCS) Division of Parole and Probation (P & P) in the Mayor's Office of Employment Development's (MOED) Northwest One-Stop Career Center. This project, one example of the type of innovation that is on the rise in Baltimore City, emerged from the work of scores of City agencies, community organizations, foundations and faith institutions that came together twelve months ago to address the issue of ex-offender employment.

With an estimated 9,000 people leaving the Maryland prison system and returning to Baltimore City annually, the task of assisting all of these individuals in finding jobs has surfaced as a challenge that requires significant attention and full-scale community support. The Mayor's Office of Employment Development (MOED), under the direction of the Mayor, facilitated the creation of the Baltimore Citywide Ex-offender Task Force (EOTF) in October 2002. This coalition has grown to include more than 100 government agencies, nonprofit and community-based service providers, major foundations, advocacy groups and faith leaders. Initially the group was tasked with looking at ways to better coordinate the employment resources of existing workforce and human service providers on behalf of ex-offenders; however, it soon became apparent that the needs of these individuals extended beyond getting a job. The EOTF recognized that a "blueprint" – a comprehensive action plan – was needed to guide the City's many partners in a coordinated approach to meeting the varied needs of this population.

Despite the monumental task before it, the EOTF was able to reach broad consensus and develop a set of recommendations that have the potential to improve reentry outcomes for a significant portion of Baltimore City's ex-offender population. The findings and recommendations highlighted in this report will form the foundation of the next stage of the EOTF's work – implementing a cooperative, unified plan for meeting the housing, employment transition and

support service needs of ex-offenders returning to Baltimore's neighborhoods. Helping more of these citizens make successful transitions is essential to reducing crime and recidivism and strengthening Baltimore's families, communities and workforce.

Galvanized by the EOTF's work, Baltimore's service providers are now making conscious decisions to work together to confront the myriad of reentry challenges that Bernard and others like him face when returning home to Baltimore. Additionally, policy makers are now actively initiating changes to ensure that each ex-offender can access the support and resources needed to find employment and build a successful new life.

Report and Recommendations

National Perspective

The U.S. Department of Labor (2001) found that employment is absolutely crucial to the successful reintegration of offenders and to ensuring public safety through reduction in crime. Though employment diminishes the likelihood of an ex-offender being rearrested, reconvicted and re-incarcerated, the Department of Labor also found that ex-offenders face multiple barriers to employment including substance abuse problems, spotty work histories, physical and mental health issues, and bias against them. Their report cautions that any one of these barriers can impede an ex-offender's ability to become employed. Taken altogether, they create formidable obstacles to getting, maintaining, and advancing in a job.

Taxman et al (2002) suggest that correctional systems alone do not have the capacity to assist inmates in developing a plan to facilitate their transition into the community. Noting that the current process makes the offender largely accountable for reentry and reintegration, they suggest that the reentry system is built on three unrealistic assumptions about the offender: that s/he can return to her/his place of residence with ease; is able to make meaningful arrangements from prison; and can transition from being dependent (having all decisions and movements controlled by the prison environment) to independence instantaneously (overnight). A national recidivism rate of 66% appears to corroborate the impracticality of the current reentry system. Taking this into account, in the second phase of its work, the EOTF expects to reengineer Baltimore's reentry processes to create opportunities to proactively engage the ex-offender, matching needs and services to produce productive behaviors and skills that result in sustainable employment.

Local Perspective

A body of research is emerging on Baltimore's ex-offender reentry and reintegration practices. La Vigne and Kachnowski (2003) report, for example, that the majority of Baltimore's ex-offenders reside in neighborhoods that typically have even higher poverty, crime, and drug addiction rates than usual. Their research indicates that the neighborhoods to which ex-offenders return, for the most part, also lack the social, workforce development and health services infrastructure necessary to support the ongoing needs of a high volume of reentries. Their report also points out that a large proportion of ex-prisoners return to a small number of disadvantaged communities; 59% of State prison releases return to Baltimore City, with 30% returning to just six of Baltimore's 55 communities. Although Segal's (2003) report identifies the difficulties faced by this population and indicates that Baltimore City's own characteristics and demographics can sometimes hamper positive reentry outcomes, it is expected that change in the

way services are provided to ex-offenders will occur due to the strategic alliances that have been forged and continue to evolve as a result of the EOTF's ongoing work and structure.

The impact of Maryland's prison releases on Baltimore City is nonetheless tremendous. Maryland's prison population tripled, increasing from 7,731 to 23,752 (Greene & Roche), as a result of rising crime rates and arrests, increasing admissions of drug offenders into prison, and more parole violators returning to prison during the 1980s and 1990s. Approximately 15,000 men and women, including mandatory releases and parolees, exit Maryland's prisons each year. The trend in prison releases to Baltimore City is expected to continue for the foreseeable future. In addition to the large numbers of ex-offenders returning to Baltimore City, the courts are placing significant numbers of felony and misdemeanor convicted individuals on probation and releasing them to the supervision of the Division of Parole and Probation.

59% of Maryland prison releases return to Baltimore City, with 30% returning to just six of Baltimore's 55 communities

The typical ex-offender returning to Baltimore City is addicted, broke and without hope. African-American and male (90%), between the ages of 20 and 40 – with a median age at release of 33 (La Vigne and Kachnowski), Baltimore's ex-offenders often have little more than a 6th grade education. Although they have paid their debt to society, most are unprepared for the harsh realities of reentry. With the current recidivism rate in Baltimore City at 51%, it is essential that their short and longer-term needs, both prior to and after release, be addressed if this number is going to be reduced. Their immediate short-term needs include obtaining identification documents and finding housing and a source of income. Longer term needs include behavior modification services, basic literacy skills, occupational skills training, physical and mental health treatment, substance abuse treatment and meaningful employment.

The benefits of managing reentry and dedicating more resources to reentry and reintegration would be enormous. For example, studies have shown that having a job that pays a decent wage is associated with lower rates of re-offending. Put another way, reductions in wages are likely to lead to increases in illegal earnings and criminal activities. According to one estimate, a 10 percent decrease in an individual's wages is associated with a 10 to 20 percent increase in his or her criminal activity and likelihood of incarceration (Kling). Funding reentry programs, proven to reduce recidivism in the long run, would also produce significant cost-savings to the State, which currently spends approximately \$22,000 per person per year on incarceration.

Baltimore's Response to the Challenge

As mentioned previously, the EOTF was convened and met for nine months (October 2002 through June 2003) to share information, define the issues and determine what could be done to connect more of Baltimore's ex-offenders to employment and support services. At the close of the initial general meeting in October 2002, it was clear that ex-offender employment hinged on removing immediate barriers such as the need for photo identification, temporary housing and health treatment. As the magnitude and diversity of the problem areas emerged, subcommittees (e.g., Model Development, Advocacy, Employer, Faith-based, Housing, and Survey) were created to support the EOTF's efforts and develop plans for interagency coordination and eventual implementation. The EOTF's efforts gained further momentum when a project manager joined MOED in February 2003 to provide staff support. General meetings took place bi-monthly through June 2003 and resumed again in December to kick-off Phase 2, the project implementation stage. The minutes of the EOTF's general and committee meetings can be viewed at www.oedworks.com.

The commitment and dedication of all the EOTF members was apparent from the first meeting. The energy of this dynamic group of volunteers increased as the membership grew. This large group dedicated itself to promoting change and enhancing and improving the scope of services delivered to Baltimore City's ex-offenders. Members' enthusiasm has kept this initiative in front of policymakers, ensuring that they and other key stakeholders are fully apprised of the challenges that Baltimore faces and are actively engaged in identifying and implementing solutions.

As the EOTF learned, Baltimore's challenge is far greater than simply connecting ex-offenders to jobs. Not only must the City cope with the sheer volume of inmate releases, it must implement strategies to address ex-offenders' multiple, concurrent service needs, including the need for identity documents, housing and employment. Additional services are often necessary as well, such as mental health and/or behavior modification services, substance abuse treatment, remediation and occupational skills training. Of necessity, new and/or better interagency and organizational partnerships must be established that simplify access to workforce development services and enable cross referrals to support services. While progress is being made in these areas, much work remains to be done.

Members' enthusiasm has kept this initiative in front of policymakers, ensuring that they and other key stakeholders are fully apprised of the challenges that Baltimore faces and are actively engaged in identifying and implementing solutions.

Findings and Recommendations of the Task Force

This section of the report highlights the EOTF's findings regarding the critical unmet needs of Baltimore City's ex-offender population. These fall into three broad, interrelated categories:

- *Inadequate resources exist to provide a comprehensive menu of services that remove barriers to employment and promote ex-offender job readiness.*
- *Minimal coordination exists among agencies and service organizations to ensure that ex-offenders are aware of, and have access to, available resources and services.*
- *Advocacy is needed to impact the numerous legislative areas that impede offender employment.*

Additionally, the EOTF learned that these issues were further compounded by the fact that ex-offenders are often barred from most federally funded needs-based programs and cannot legally reside in public housing. Thus, employment is vital to ensure that their basic subsistence needs are met shortly after release. And, as if these were not enough challenges, the EOTF concurred that area businesses are reluctant to hire ex-offenders, and job openings matching ex-inmates' low educational attainment and skill levels are scarce.

Finding 1:

Inadequate resources exist to provide a comprehensive menu of services that remove barriers to employment and promote ex-offender job readiness.

The growth of the prison population and reductions in funding and prison staff have resulted in fewer services being available to the large numbers of incarcerated individuals in need of them. Opportunities for prisoners to access remediation or training that will give them the skill sets to quickly transition to gainful employment upon release have dwindled as budget and other priorities have shifted over the past decade. With the limited resources available, the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services is currently only able to offer literacy and GED classes, occupational training, and substance abuse services to a small number of inmates. The lack of services available to prisoners is being addressed in the Division of Corrections' newly proposed three-year strategic plan that will identify offenders with the greatest needs and risks, increase remedial and substance abuse services, provide specialized pre-release planning and develop partnerships for post-release services.

Nevertheless, at present the corrections system does not have either the staff configuration or monetary resources to prepare all inmates for the difficult transition. Outside the fence, while coordination of effort is improving, critical gaps in service delivery remain. The City is also

challenged by not having adequate resources to address ongoing needs, such as available health services (e.g., addiction and mental health treatment), transportation, permanent housing, employment, and family reunification services.

Recommendations – Finding 1

Education

Low literacy and lack of educational skills are significant barriers to employment. Approximately 60% of the inmates in Maryland's correctional institutions are high school dropouts. Twenty percent read at or below the third grade level when they enter prison. The current average TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education) intake test score of inmates is 6.0. Although Maryland law requires 120 days of school attendance for individuals whose sentences are 18 months or longer, waiting lists are lengthy due to staff cuts and reduced funding levels. Also, many inmates are released from prison before they can participate in an education program. Statewide, more than 1,800 inmates are waiting for educational services. Basic literacy and GED training must start early and continue during the period of incarceration.

Recommendation: Identify and assess those most in need; begin occupational training early and continue it throughout the period of incarceration.

Recommendation: Identify and assess those most in need; begin basic literacy and GED classes early and continue them throughout the period of incarceration.

Housing

Many ex-inmates have nowhere to go on release (La Vigne et al), and Federal law prohibits most from residing in public housing. Often the families of ex-offenders are either unwilling or unable to welcome them into their homes. Anecdotal evidence suggests that a significant proportion of ex-offenders are homeless.

Recommendation: Increase the number of transitional housing slots available in the City to accommodate the ex-offender population.

Health

Substance abuse is particularly prevalent in the incarcerated population. Ex-offenders who are recovering addicts are seriously at risk for relapse. However, there are waiting lists for substance abuse treatment slots. Limited ability to track ex-offenders who need treatment, but have not sought it, or who sought it but have relapsed, is also a serious problem. As well, physical health problems and disabilities are especially apparent in the incarcerated male population, and ex-inmates are prone to mental health problems. Dr. James Holwager, clinical director of the Patuxent Institution, Maryland's mental health facility for inmates, reports that up to 20% of all inmates have mental health problems that require treatment. Additionally, the EOTF learned that

inmates frequently have not been assisted in making attitudinal changes toward a positive perspective on their life after prison and would benefit from workshops, seminars and counseling to help them prepare for the transition.

Recommendation: Increase the substance abuse, mental health and health treatment services available to inmates and ex-offenders.

Recommendation: Address the attitudinal and personal issues of offenders before and during their transition.

Transitional Services

Most prisoners are not prepared to make a smooth transition into the community and workplace. Many ex-inmates lack the skills and qualifications for all but the most entry-level jobs, and employers are often unwilling to hire them. Studies indicate that 57% of probationers and 40% of parolees and mandatory released prisoners are unemployed.

The Fraternal Order of Ex-offenders reported to the EOTF that a number of services must be provided to ex-offenders to ensure their successful transition and re-entry into the community. These include: employment readiness, literacy and GED services, as well as addiction treatment. Reintegration into the community also requires behavior modification for ex-offenders, who may have attitudinal problems, depression and other issues. In addition, efforts to reunify fractured families and the support and commitment of the community are needed in order for them to succeed. In short, the community must take an active role in ex-offender reentry.

Additionally, the EOTF concurred that investing in a plan to provide a Release Portfolio is essential to successful re-entry. Its contents will readily provide the offender with identification documents and information regarding service providers in order to access services and achieve employment connections.

Recommendation: Develop, expand and formalize the referral process from the DPSCS to employment and training providers serving ex-offenders.

Recommendation: Coordinate efforts with the Division of Corrections to ensure that existing procedures are followed so that ex-offenders can secure Social Security Cards, birth certificates and Maryland State Identification.

Recommendation: Create a Release Portfolio, to include appropriate identification documentation as well as referral information regarding available resources, to be given to each inmate about to leave custody.

Recommendation: Expand successful programs that provide transitional housing, mentoring, job skills upgrades and job placement services.

Recommendation: Increase the marketable skills of ex-offenders by providing the opportunity for occupational skills training through One-Stop Career Centers and other service providers.

Recommendation: Consolidate existing resources that are presently housed separately, and create a One-Stop Center for ex-offenders that provides a full menu of services, with an emphasis on employment.

Recommendation: Expand the Northwest One-Stop Career Center/Division of Parole and Probation model to other MOED One-Stops.

Recommendation: Increase the number of work release programs to assist low-risk, incarcerated individuals in getting the skills necessary to sustain long-term employment after release.

Recommendation: Promote employer engagement and expand the employer base to create more job opportunities for ex-offenders.

Recommendation: Make legal assistance available to ex-offenders seeking to expunge their misdemeanor records.

Recommendation: Develop a reintegration plan that taps the expertise of community- and faith- based organizations to provide behavior modification for returning offenders and family reunification services.

Finding 2:

Minimal coordination exists among agencies and service organizations to ensure that ex-offenders are aware of, and have access to, available resources and services.

During the EOTF's early deliberations, the need to improve interagency cooperation and increase ex-offenders' awareness of and access to available resources and services quickly became apparent. Many task force members were unaware of the full array of resources available to ex-offenders returning to Baltimore City. Most were working in their own "silos" and the services that they were providing impacted only a small percentage of the population in need. Little or no coordination of service delivery across agencies and organizations was underway.

The EOTF concurred that effective partnerships among those organizations and employers that have an interest in or are providing services to offenders, both prior to and after release, are necessary to improve reentry and employment outcomes for ex-offenders. Given the significant information gaps, the Task Force agreed that one of the products most needed was a comprehensive web-based catalogue or listing of agencies/organizations and the services they provide to the ex-offender population. This is currently being accomplished through the coordinated effort of several EOTF member organizations and staff.

The EOTF also found that, historically, there has also been little coordination between the service providers and the Division of Parole and Probation. For example, at Mondawmin Mall,

the Division of Parole and Probation office and an MOED One-Stop Career Center are located next door to each other. Despite this proximity, until recently referrals from the Division of Parole and Probation to the One-Stop were sporadic at best, and results of referrals were inconclusive. In July 2003, a formal Memorandum of Understanding was implemented between MOED's Northwest Career Center and the Division of Parole and Probation to outstation a job developer from the Division of Parole and Probation at the One-Stop. This effort was the first tangible step in altering thinking to promote a more coordinated service delivery effort and may be expanded to include MOED's three other One-Stops.

Additionally, the EOTF learned that information exchange is another important part of coordination of effort and capacity building. Several broadcast media events have been initiated to communicate information about ex-offender reentry over the past months. Efforts to recognize employers that have hired ex-offenders and to promote the hiring of this population are ongoing. Additionally, a regional forum that includes representatives from public and private agencies and organizations as well as advocacy groups has been established to exchange information in a continuing effort to better coordinate services and resolve problems.

Recommendations - Finding 2

Data Exchange

Recommendation: Catalog, in a web-based system, available resources and programs serving ex-offenders throughout the City.

Recommendation: Create a user-friendly web page that links ex-offender service providers to MOED's web site and interfaces with the United Way's First Call for Help and Maryland's 2-1-1 systems.

Recommendation: Create a systematic approach to collecting usable data that validates return on investment in service areas to be identified and evaluated based on input from the Steering Committee.

Capacity Building

Recommendation: Formalize a process by which the providers and other organizations come together to exchange information.

Recommendation: Create a community- and faith-based mentorship program for ex-offenders.

Recommendation: Build capacity for organizations currently serving ex-offenders via (no-cost) training to be provided by the Maryland Institute for Employment and Training Professionals (MIETP).

Finding 3:

Advocacy is needed to impact the numerous legislative areas that impede ex-offender employment.

The child support/arrearage issue is one of the conflicting or negative regulatory policies cited by EOTF members. Child support continues to accrue during the period of incarceration unless the inmate completes a Child Support Modification Form at the time of or during incarceration. However, inmates are either unaware of the need to complete the form or are unable to do so due to their low literacy skills. Released with significant child support arrearages, ex-offenders face the immediate prospect of paying off debt. Those with arrearages who become employed will have up to 65% of their wages garnished to fulfill their child support obligation. Those who do not become employed after release from prison face the possibility of suspension of their driver's license, bad credit reports and/or further imprisonment. Advocacy efforts in this arena, already initiated, include efforts in the Maryland General Assembly to craft legislation that reduces the detrimental effects of child support arrearages. Under current Federal child support guidelines, there cannot be retroactive forgiveness of child support debt. The proposed legislation would change the definition of "arrearages." Sponsorship will be confirmed shortly. Members of the EOTF have also reached out to representatives of the Child Support Enforcement Agency and the DPSCS to develop a strategy to enable offenders to modify child support orders during incarceration, thereby preventing arrearages from accruing.

Expungement of criminal records and public housing issues are other areas of concern that the EOTF identified. With regard to housing, ex-offenders in Baltimore City have been denied publicly subsidized housing because of their criminal histories. The Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC) has agreed to revise its ex-offender admission policies, allowing certain ex-offenders admittance to public and Section 8 housing after a prescribed waiting period. Legislation relative to expungement of nuisance records will be introduced in the 2004 Maryland General Assembly. The purpose of this legislation is to enable individuals to petition for expungement when certain circumstances are present.

Recommendations - Finding 3

Child Support

***Recommendation:* Promote legislation that allows for the suspension of child support obligations during the period of incarceration.**

Expungement

***Recommendation:* Promote the possibility of expunging misdemeanor charges.**

Employment

Recommendation: Promote legislation to increase funding for the City to increase front-end work release programs for low-risk incarcerated individuals.

Recommendation: Promote the employment of ex-offenders in municipal jobs.

Phase 2 _____

With the publication of this report, Baltimore City's ex-offender project moves into the next phase. In this phase, the governance and organizational structure will be defined by a Mayoral appointed Steering Committee that will meet regularly to define and formulate objectives, operationalize the goals, objectives and action agenda of each recommendation, create a roll out plan, and produce periodic reports detailing progress in key areas for review by City and State officials and other stakeholders. Once formed the Steering Committee will be the direct conduit for conversation and dialogue with the Mayor.

Ongoing and Special Projects Related to Ex-offenders in the City of Baltimore _____

It is important to note that, although the EOTF is shifting into an action-oriented mode, much important work has been accomplished over the past year. The following list highlights promising initiatives to enhance service delivery capacity and coordination, launched over the past twelve months, which will be incorporated into the second phase of Baltimore's ex-offender project.

- *Baltimore Transitional Jobs Project Consortium* – Established in 2002, this group, comprised of public and private sector partners and the philanthropic community including several members of the EOTF, has secured funding and will provide oversight to a pilot transitional employment program for ex-offenders returning to Baltimore City. Through a request for proposals process, the Consortium has identified an organizational entity, Project Bridge, consisting of four service providers (Goodwill Industries, Second Chance Project, STRIVE, and Associated Catholic Charities) to collaborate and implement the initial phase of this project early in 2004.
- *U.S. Department of Justice training on reentry best practices* – A group of EOTF members has been chosen to receive training on reentry best practices in place across the U.S.

Participating will be representatives from the DPSCS Division of Corrections; DPSCS Division of Parole and Probation; the Maryland State Department of Education; Empower Baltimore Management Corporation; Mayor's Office of Employment Development; and Associated Catholic Charities.

- *Mayor's Office of Employment Development's Northwest Career Center and the Division of Parole and Probation joint effort to connect ex-offenders to jobs* – Through a service coordination initiative, MOED's Northwest Career Center now houses a Division of Parole and Probation job developer. Together, MOED and the Division of Parole and Probation assist ex-offenders in connecting to occupational skills training, remediation and employment.
- *Creation of a job development change agent position* – With funding from the Weinberg Foundation, a job developer position has been created within MOED to develop job opportunities specifically for ex-offenders.
- *Targeted Ex-offender Job Fairs* – MOED has taken the lead in this area. Job fairs take place periodically throughout MOED's One-Stop Career Center Network to help ex-offenders make the employment connection.
- *Employer Appreciation Breakfasts* – These events showcase businesses that have hired ex-offenders and made a commitment to assisting this population.
- *Linkage with Maryland Justice Coalition* – The Maryland Justice Coalition has agreed to act as the conduit for promoting legislative initiatives identified by the EOTF.

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