

Governor's Council of Second Chance Employers

2025 Annual Report

TEAM 
KENTUCKY®

OFFICE OF
REENTRY SERVICES

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Overview

On [Oct. 17, 2024](#), Gov. Beshear signed an [executive order](#) creating the Governor's Council of Second Chance Employers. This council aims to promote second chance hiring practices, improve reentry outcomes for individuals released from incarceration, and reduce recidivism rates in the state. The council meets quarterly and provides annual reports to the Governor.

The Governor's Council of Second Chance Employers brings together leaders, experts, and practitioners at the nexus of business, reentry, and government to review, develop, and promote collaborative and innovative strategies in second chance employment.

Members of the Governor's Council of Second Chance Employers include:

- **Governor Andy Beshear** of the *Commonwealth of Kentucky*, representing government
- **Barbara Aker** of *More Than a Bakery*, representing the manufacturing industry
- **Nick D'Andrea** of *UPS*, representing the transportation and logistics industry
- **John Estus** of *Amazon*, representing multi-sector operations
- **Stephen Johnson** of *Martin Contracting*, representing the construction and utilities industry
- **LaKisha Miller**, representing the *Kentucky Chamber of Commerce*
- **Chad Mills** of the *Kentucky State Building and Construction Trades Council*, representing unions
- **Rob Perez** of *DV8 Kitchen*, representing the food service and hospitality industry
- **Steve Powless** of *Lifeline Recovery Center*, representing the health care industry
- **Tyler Stegall** of *BlueOval SK*, representing the manufacturing industry
- **Ryan Quarles** of the *Kentucky Community and Technical College System*, representing higher education
- **Tami Wilson** of the *Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce*, representing regional chamber of commerce organizations
- **Secretary Steven Stack** of the *Cabinet for Health and Family Services*, representing government
- **Secretary Jamie Link** of the *Education and Labor Cabinet*, representing government
- **Secretary Keith L. Jackson** of the *Justice and Public Safety Cabinet*, representing government

The council is part of a broader effort by the Beshear-Coleman administration to support individuals who have served their sentences by enhancing their employability through skills development. The Governor has emphasized the importance of helping former inmates secure meaningful employment to foster safer communities and enhance public safety.

Investing in second chance employment in a targeted way is sound criminal justice policy. It ultimately reduces crime, improves public safety, and strengthens the economy. A stable, good-paying job and the dignity of work are essential to preventing individuals from reoffending, ultimately making our communities safer and our families more whole. Kentucky is experiencing historic economic investment, and employers are looking for qualified and ready-to-work employees right here in the commonwealth. When someone leaves incarceration and successfully enters their communities, it reduces costs to the state and, most importantly, it reduces crime and ensures there are less crime victims in the commonwealth.

Since Gov. Beshear took office, Team Kentucky has recorded [some of the lowest recidivism rates](#) in the past ten years. In February 2025, Gov. Andy Beshear [announced](#) that Kentucky secured

another low recidivism rate. Nearly 70% of people released from state custody over the past two years have not been re-incarcerated.

For those inmates, the current recidivism rate is 30.81%, which is 1.6% lower than the prior year. Kentucky defines recidivism as re-incarceration within 24 months of release from custody. In 2020, the state recorded the lowest rate ever of 27.15%.

Since taking office, Gov. Beshear has secured more than 1,200 private-sector new-location and expansion projects, creating more than 68,000 jobs. Kentucky is also in the midst of the best five-year period in state history for economic growth, with the most investment secured under Gov. Beshear's administration of any governor in Kentucky history. The investment secured by Gov. Beshear also includes the three largest economic development projects on record. In order to capitalize on this, we must ensure that every Kentuckian can share in these opportunities and that we are developing qualified and career-ready workforce from traditional and untapped talent pools to meet the demands of our economy.

In Kentucky, **95% of those in state custody will be released back into their communities.** Team Kentucky is committed to supporting reentry programs and quality second chances in order to increase their chances of success. If inmates leaving state custody are prepared to participate in the economy and be productive members of their communities, Kentucky will reduce future crime and enhance our economy.

Council Activities & Findings

In its first year, the Governor's Council of Second Chance Employers met quarterly. These meetings included member spotlights; presentations on the corrections systems, reentry services, education programs and opportunities, and workforce services that are available; updates on the Governor's reentry initiatives; and topical discussions on employer insights and experiences.

Council meetings also included:

- Inaugural meeting at the Capitol with Gov. Beshear to launch the newly created council and learn about Gov. Beshear's two-pronged approach to enhanced reentry services;
- Luther Lockett Correctional Complex tour to learn about the criminal justice system, the Department of Corrections (DOC) reentry and education programs, and council member More Than A Bakery's approach and success with integrating second chance employment;
- Education & Labor Cabinet (ELC) visit to highlight ELC's reentry and adult education programs, incentives for second-chance employers, and the Jobs on Day One partnership with the Ironworkers Union, DOC, and ELC;
- DV8 Kitchen (council member) visit to learn about intentional second chance hiring and discussion with current second chance employees; and
- Tour of the Kentucky Community & Technical College System (council member) Georgetown campus to highlight their education partnerships in jails and prisons across Kentucky and to share the collaborative Reentry Campus proposal between the Beshear-Coleman administration, KCTCS, and key legislators.

The council also launched three small workgroups focused on second chance successes, industry resources, and public-private partnerships. Through these, the council developed targeted work products and guidance for the Governor's Office with the goal of recruiting more second-chance employers, enhancing reentry and vocational services, and improving public resources available to current and potential second chance employers, key partners and stakeholders, and former

inmates. These products included information on reentry and education services offered during incarceration to prepare individuals for release; opportunities for second chance employers, like the Work Opportunity Tax Credit and federal bonding; and job postings for education and vocational positions within Kentucky prisons.

The council identified the importance of having employer ambassadors and success stories to elevate the impactful work of reentry and employment and to break down barriers and hesitation around becoming a second chance employer. The workgroups identified partners to highlight the best ways to get those testimonials to the public. From these recommendations, Team Kentucky created several videos to emphasize the importance of second chance opportunities and resulting successes. Spotlight videos from More Than A Bakery, DV8 Kitchen, and the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce have been published thus far, with videos highlighting the Jobs on Day One Ironworkers partnership and DOC education programs forthcoming.

Many of these work products were incorporated into secondchance.ky.gov, a one-stop shop for employers, those who have a history of incarceration, and partners who are interested in supporting or being part of second chance employment.

In its first year, the quarterly council meetings also provided meaningful opportunities for valuable insight, feedback, requests and questions from members, as well as spotlights and opportunities to share their successes, advice, and lessons learned in second chance employment. These spotlights and open discussions proved to be one of the most useful tools for the council.

Governor Beshear's Reentry Initiatives

Second chances and successful reentry are a priority for the Beshear-Coleman administration because successful reentry is a public safety investment that is also critical for workforce development and strengthening the economy. In October 2024, the Governor directed Team Kentucky to redouble its efforts on reentry with a specific focus on second chance employment. By utilizing resources available within the Executive Branch, leveraging relationships with essential partners, and utilizing the advice of the council, Team Kentucky has invested in and expanded reentry services and second chance employment in unprecedented ways over the past year.

In April 2025, the Governor announced more than a dozen new vocational programs at Kentucky's prisons across the state. These include training in plumbing, basic construction skills, HVAC, and commercial vehicle operation. In September 2025, the Governor announced the launch of five more courses at DOC in construction, aquaponics, plumbing, and CDL permit programs. In November 2025, DOC launched the first licensed cosmetology program in a Kentucky prison. By the end of 2025, DOC offered 26 courses to inmates to prepare them for employment on release.

In 2025, each of Kentucky's 14 state prisons established its own reentry center. These operate inside the prisons and deliver focused life-skills training designed to prepare inmates for success upon release. In October 2025, DOC expanded its reentry centers by opening reading corners in each state prison, which help strengthen family bonds and promote literacy.

At Governor Beshear's direction, ELC and DOC partnered to invest over \$1 million in second chance hiring, including the vocational program expansion at DOC, technological improvements at the reentry centers, and the Jobs on Day One initiative.

Through the Jobs on Day One initiative, a skilled trades pre-apprenticeship training in state prisons, DOC partnered with the Kentucky State Building & Construction Trades Council on two pilot projects. Two prisons are partnering with the Ironworkers Local Union #70 on a two-year program for inmates to become skilled ironworkers who will help install and assemble the structural steel and iron components that build the framework of Kentucky's buildings and bridges. This pilot has had 45 inmates complete the program already, with several who have since been released from prison and working in their local Ironworkers union. The Painters Union was also funded for one cohort at the Kentucky Correctional Institution for Women, with 14 inmates completing the pilot this year. DOC and the Painters Union are exploring ways to continue the program for future cohorts.

The Kentucky Chamber of Commerce, through its Kentucky Chamber Foundation (KCF), and DOC partnered together on a Fair Chance Hiring Campaign (FCHC) pilot, which recruited over 20 employers from across the state and across industries who committed to making at least 10 second-chance hires. Rather than operating as a direct service provider or placement agency, KCF functioned as a trusted intermediary for these businesses by coordinating education, facilitating partnerships, and delivering individualized technical assistance. Each business worked directly with a contact from DOC and the Chamber on how to become a second-chance employer, providing tailored support and one-on-one coaching to build confidence and reduce perceived risks. DOC and the Chamber received real-time feedback and lessons learned as employers navigated the journey, including successes, barriers, and opportunities. The pilot resulted in clear behavior change, with several employers revising hiring policies, removing blanket disqualifiers, and improving onboarding processes. From the pilot, KCF and DOC identified that training alone is not sufficient to help employers make the leap to intentional second chance hiring, and businesses benefit from one-on-one support and tailored technical assistance with relationship building a key driver. The Fair Chance Hiring Campaign pilot served as a successful proof of concept. With targeted support and the right partnerships in place, Kentucky employers demonstrated that they are willing and able to lead in fair chance hiring.

In April 2025, the Governor established the Team Kentucky Office of Reentry Services by Executive Order and attached it to the Governor's Office with a goal of enhancing and expanding reentry services and coordinating across the Executive Branch and with stakeholders to continue the work and advance the mission of providing high-quality reentry services to inmates and those who have returned to their communities.

Team Kentucky remains committed to creating quality second chance opportunities in the commonwealth in 2026 and beyond. The Beshear-Coleman administration is proud to partner with the Kentucky Community & Technical College System to construct a game-changing reentry campus at Northpoint Training Center. The Governor recommended the funding necessary in his [2026-2028 executive budget](#). The [proposed program](#) would be one of the first of its kind in the nation and make Kentucky a national model in offering vocational training in industries that support the commonwealth's booming economy.

Next Steps & Recommendations

Together, Gov. Beshear's reentry initiatives and the council have built the infrastructure necessary for a transformational and successful reentry system that creates a safer Kentucky and a stronger economy and workforce. Through collaborative and coordinated pilots, projects, and products,

Team Kentucky has been able to work with key partners and employers to break down silos and barriers, develop critical feedback loops, and improve access to information.

Looking forward, the council recommends that the next phase of the Governor’s reentry initiative addresses ways to sustain newly implemented reentry and education programs; increase direct hires from jails and prisons as people are released; secure more second-chance employer commitments; and enhance and expand wraparound services.

It is important that there is specific outreach and recruitment to employers. In this effort, the council plans to develop a presentation for council members and partners which could be shared with local communities, local workforce development boards, regional and local chambers of commerce, nonprofits and community organizations, and targeted employers to encourage second chance hiring and share resources available to support that effort.

In its next year, the council will explore ways to strengthen and expand wraparound services. Every community in Kentucky is different, and the needs of every individual returning from prison are different. Kentucky has a wide range of knowledgeable partners in this space who are leading in this field, and the Council is committed to finding ways to help coordinate and support partners and resources that enhance wraparound services, such as transportation and housing, which help second chance employees and employers succeed.

The council also recognizes that jails continue to be an area where investments, coordination, and services are needed, and it is looking at how to meet those local needs.

Governor’s Council of Second Chance Employers

Highlights and Case Studies

More Than A Bakery

More Than A Bakery and Richmond Baking are part of a family-owned and operated contract manufacturing group with roots going back over a century. Together, they represent a new way of thinking about work and community. Its mission is to create an environment where the company’s efforts give back to families, friends, and neighbors. They believe life needs balance, and they strive to ensure that everyone at Richmond Baking and More Than A Bakery not only values their careers but truly enjoys them. That results in opportunities for growth, benefits for stability, and community outreach.

More Than A Bakery employs a total of 152 employees and provides entry hourly wages of \$18.63. Second chance hiring has had success here, as More Than A Bakery has hired 46 second chance employees since 2022 and currently employs 22 second chance employees, 18 of whom come from the justice system and four from recovery programs. The length of incarceration for the second-chance talent ranges from three months to 25 years, with nine individuals having served more than 5 years.

According to More Than A Bakery, second-chance talent often has “the fire in their belly” to do work that results in stronger performance immediately upon hire, lower absenteeism, and the

drive to grow in their positions. In fact, of the 22 second chance employees currently working at More Than A Bakery, eight employees have been promoted once, and five employees have been promoted twice.

More Than A Bakery works closely with DOC and continually shows a willingness to assist inmates with employment prior to release. More Than A Bakery offers virtual interviews for those incarcerated prior to release and are willing to conduct interviews on site at the Blackburn Correctional Complex. In addition to DOC, More Than A Bakery recruits from greater Lexington based nonprofits, such as the Lexington Rescue Mission and Jubilee Jobs. Other second chance applicants have been referred to More Than A Bakery by current employees or recruited from social media or news outlets.

Watch video of More Than A Bakery and Team Kentucky: <https://youtu.be/lax-Qjs-ZPU>

DV8 Kitchen

DV8 Kitchen was developed and operates as a second chance employment opportunity for people who are trying to redirect their lives. People in the early stages of addiction recovery often find it difficult to find employers willing to take a chance on them, and DV8 has taken on that challenge and embraced the community engagement, healing, and accountability that is required in both recovery and employment.

DV8 Kitchen operates two restaurants in Lexington with the moral vision of creating a future where anyone in active recovery is able to find meaningful employment. They believe that providing employment at DV8 Kitchen can lead to a lifetime ability to gain and maintain employment and deviate from their past lifestyle.

Employees at DV8 Kitchen attend bi-weekly workshops designed to teach life skills, enrich their life experiences, help create a positive work environment, and build community. Additionally, DV8 Kitchen Vocational Training Foundation, Inc. outfits employees with uniforms and food handler permits while sharing the restaurant's mission with other businesses to encourage the introduction of opportunities for second-chance employees.

DV8's foundation partners with recovery homes to employ residents ready to enter the workforce. Recovery homes provide safe housing, as well as accountability through testing and residents working a meaningful recovery program. The foundation is in the process of developing a mentorship program to further the goals and needs of each employee by helping the individual remove barriers and develop an individualized career path for each employee.

Through its model, DV8 has a retention rate of 80% and an average tenure of 1.5 years for its employees. much higher compared to the restaurant industry average of a couple of months. Employees average about \$15/hour in entry wages and actively participate in DV8 Kitchen's recovery validation that ensures employees focus on housing, behavioral modification, community building, and positive employment outcomes. By focusing on these aspects, DV8 not only operates a profitable enterprise, but it also creates a community that embraces recovery and second chances.

DOC works with DV8 Kitchen by referring the population supervised by DOC to apply for employment opportunities as they arise. DV8 is a well-known and respected proponent for hiring

people in recovery and serving as an agent for change among other businesses and organizations who seek to implement similar business models. DOC keeps open communication with DV8 Kitchen by utilizing the Reentry Employment Coordinator in the area and will continue to make referrals to DV8 Kitchen when assessing individuals in need of employment.

Watch video of DV8 Kitchen and Team Kentucky:

<https://youtube.com/shorts/HnrfduOLpsg?si=zrVQYXFSN5vIHq8J>

Ironworkers Local #70 – Pre-Apprenticeship Prison Training

Ironworkers Local #70 was one of first organizations to participate in Gov. Beshear’s Jobs on Day One initiative by providing pre-apprenticeship training with the goal of equipping inmates with technical skills to be job ready on day one of release. Through the partnership with ELC and DOC, the two-year pilot project is building a direct talent pipeline to their registered apprenticeship program. With a five-week training program prior to release from prison, newly released apprentices are entering a high-demand career and earning starting wages and benefits of \$50/hour including health care.

Ironworkers Local #70 is dedicated to building with integrity, skill, and safety. Members take pride in mastering structural, reinforcing, and ornamental ironwork, ensuring quality craftsmanship on every project. Ironworkers Local #70 serves the Louisville area under the International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental, and Reinforcing Ironworkers. Over the decades, they have expanded to 45 counties in Kentucky and 15 counties in Southern Indiana, with offices in Louisville and a satellite location in Lexington.

As with many skilled trades, the demand for talent is high. A multi-pronged approach to recruitment is necessary: increasing exposure and awareness in middle school, career and technical education in high school, and engagement with adults in the world of work. The adult population requires a recruitment strategy that goes beyond the traditional talent pools in trades to a focused and targeted approach that includes veterans, women, and former inmates. By increasing the recruitment pools, talent pipelines are beginning to support the growing need for skilled craftsmen and craftswomen.

As a member of the Kentucky Building and Construction Trades Council, the Ironworkers learned about Jobs on Day and its goals of equipping inmates with skills to get a job immediately upon release, making communities safer and boosting Kentucky’s workforce participation. The Kentucky Building and Construction Trades Council, representing 14 crafts, is a natural fit for the initiative because each craft has an apprenticeship program. While the qualifications for a registered apprenticeship program vary by craft, all of them will recognize any relevant skills an individual brings to the job, including those learned through a pre-apprenticeship program.

While sister unions on the west coast were building strong talent pipelines from prisons to the workforce, Ironworkers Local #70 knew that no other local in their international union was doing this groundbreaking work in the Midwest nor on the east coast, so its leaders began exploring this idea for the commonwealth. After touring prisons in Kentucky, it was apparent that the facilities had well-equipped classrooms and a significant interest in building a pre-apprenticeship program, especially one that teaches the foundations of construction and welding. These in-demand skills are not only valuable to Local #70, but to all construction and skilled trade jobs in Kentucky and beyond.

The Ironworkers Local #70 pre-apprenticeship pilot program was designed to help inmates within one year of release gain basic skills, so they are ready for a job on the first day they return to their communities. The five-week initiative is projected to train a total of 120 inmates. Individuals are selected by DOC based on several qualifying factors, including good conduct and their one-year release date. The 40-hour per week training program at two Kentucky prisons has 15 participants in each of four cohorts resulting in an anticipated 60 trainees per prison per year.

The five weeks of training are divided into one week of introduction and self-development, two weeks of basic construction instruction, and two weeks focused on welding and structural steel, reinforcement steel and ornamental steel training including windows, glass and stairwells skills. Those who complete the pre-apprenticeship program leave with highly marketable basic construction skills, leadership skills, teamwork skills, welding fundamentals, OSHA 10, CPR, and most importantly the exposure and foundation to build careers in skilled trades. Furthermore, the pre-apprenticeship model allows individuals to find their true interest in this occupation, while trainers can see the standout talent available in this underutilized workforce population.

The pre-apprenticeship pilot program was launched at the beginning of January 2025. By August 2025, five individuals were hired as apprentices after release from prison. These formerly incarcerated individuals automatically get a 5% wage boost as they enter the apprenticeship program, as the Ironworkers Local #70 provides them with credit for prior learning. This gives them a package of close to \$50/hour, specifically \$23+/hour wages and \$26+/hour benefits, including fully covered health insurance and a pension.

Individuals in the pilot registered apprenticeship program are attaining the Jobs on Day One goal with premium wages and benefits, instead of the strong possibility of reoffending and returning to incarceration without a job.