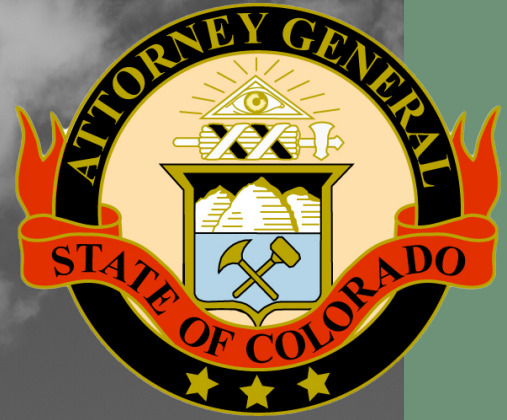
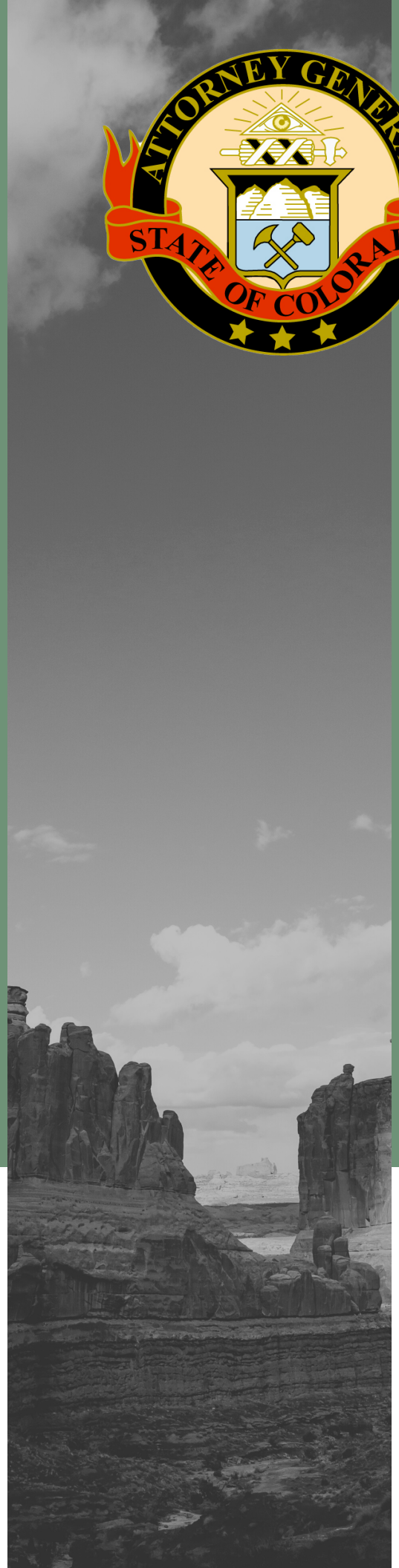


November 2021



Engaging Our Community:

Promoting Reentry
Employment to
Reduce Recidivism
and Strengthen Our
Communities



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I. Introduction

Approximately 15,000 incarcerated individuals populate Colorado state prisons at a given time. Nearly all of those people will one day complete their terms of incarceration, and each year roughly 8,500 people leaving the prison walls reenter society and rejoin our communities as neighbors, friends, caregivers, and workers.

As a state, we share a collective interest in ensuring that every person who leaves prison reenters our communities successfully and does not return to prison. Successful reentry outcomes ensure safer communities, stronger families, fewer victims of crime, and a more dynamic economy that benefits all Coloradans. Research shows that informal social bonds that are often facilitated through interactions with community organizations—including faith-based organizations, community volunteers, and dedicated mentors-- are one of the strongest predictors of whether a person will refrain from committing crime. Unfortunately, various barriers limit collaboration between agencies and community organizations, making it both more difficult to improve the lives of those re-entering society and more likely that these individuals will return to prison.

Colorado is a leader in the reentry space thanks to innovative partnerships between community employers, nonprofits, and the Colorado Department of Corrections (“CDOC”), such as the Work and Gain Education & Employment Skills (“WAGEES”) and Take TWO (“Transitional Work Opportunities”) programs. Moreover, Colorado has a robust ecosystem of community, faith-based nonprofits, and for-profit employers, many of whom have been nationally recognized as leaders in this space, all of whom are re-imagining what reentry can look like. Through the WAGEES program, for example, CDOC provides funding to community-based organizations that support people returning from incarceration throughout Colorado. Community organizations both under and outside the WAGEES umbrella, such as the Second Chance Center, Cross Purpose, Breakthrough (formerly known as Defy Colorado), Life-Line Colorado, and many others, offer individualized services for formerly incarcerated people. Those services include mentorship, care management, vocational training, cognitive behavioral therapy, employment services, family reunification support, housing assistance, and an array of

wraparound support services. In partnership with CDOC, many organizations begin providing these services prior to release from prison.

Recognizing meaningful and viable work opportunities are a critical component of effective reentry, many programs provide tailored services that address barriers to employment, including assistance with transportation, help in obtaining identification documents, criminal record expungement, providing work clothes and tools, and facilitating job searches. Take TWO, for example, places people into local employment while they are still incarcerated, providing participants a critical first step to build relationships, establishing employment history, and providing financial footing—all critical elements to support their release. Moreover, other organizations, such as Mile High WorkShop and Bayaud Enterprises, straddle the public and private sectors, providing direct employment and on-the-job training opportunities to previously incarcerated individuals.

As we look ahead at the opportunity to dramatically improve our reentry system, Colorado has a strong foundation upon which to build. That foundation positions us to reduce the likelihood that individuals who leave prison return within a short period of time (called the “recidivism rate”). The path towards improving reentry outcomes includes building support for hiring and empowering those re-entering society and deepening our investment in community driven solutions, in short, by building on the programs and services that have proven effective thus far.

Under the leadership of Colorado Attorney General Phil Weiser, the Colorado Department of Law (“Department of Law” or “Department”) is committed to improving Colorado’s criminal justice system, including by improving reentry outcomes for individuals leaving prison. To identify potential mechanisms for improving these outcomes, the Department of Law conducted a comprehensive review of the resources available to formerly incarcerated people in Colorado, with the goal of identifying strengths and opportunities to improve upon the status quo. This review centered around conversations with hundreds of organizational stakeholders in the public, private, and civic/non-profit sectors in Colorado.

The path towards improving reentry outcomes includes building support for hiring and empowering those re-entering society and deepening our investment in community driven solutions.

This report describes the process and findings of that review. The review concluded that the problem of recidivism is complex and multidimensional and that the solution requires a network of engaged community partners with resources to address three key barriers:

- Economic stability and employment,
- Access to housing, and
- Access to affordable and individualized mental health and substance abuse treatment.

Economic stability, which primarily requires obtaining stable, lawful employment with fair wages, is a significant factor in preventing recidivism. People with prior criminal convictions, however, face significant barriers to employment, and this is especially acute for people recently released from prison. Reentry stakeholders in Colorado overwhelmingly agree that improving employment opportunities and outcomes should remain a primary focus area and one where significant progress can be achieved through continued collaboration. As a result, this report focuses on the opportunities in this sphere.

In addition to employment, our review also identified access to housing and healthcare – especially mental health resources – as critical factors for successful reentry. An ideal reentry support system would ensure everyone who leaves prison has the mindset, skills, community-based supports, resources, and fair access to employment opportunities necessary to find economic stability – and, ultimately, a long-term, viable career. Providing these resources and opportunities will require investment and coordination amongst the public, private, and civic/nonprofit sectors to strengthen and scale the existing ecosystem of reentry resources available both behind and outside the walls of prison.

Broadening the reentry employment ecosystem includes leveraging existing community, public, and private partnerships with the collective goal of improved reentry outcomes. Nationally, we are witnessing a trend in the private sector towards addressing workforce shortages, promoting equity, and protecting public safety through fair opportunity hiring

policies and practices. Here in Colorado, the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce recognizes the imperative of ensuring that “fair opportunity talent” – i.e., justice-involved individuals – do not fall through the cracks simply due to prior criminal records. Moreover, Checkr, a company focused on making the hiring and background check process more efficient, has emerged as a national leader in the fair chance employment movement and is one of several companies in Colorado fostering an exemplary commitment in making this work a core component of their hiring and belonging strategies.

Many Colorado companies lack the resources and knowledge to pursue similar fair opportunity practices. While WAGEES currently engages thousands of small local employers, we face a compelling opportunity to further coordinate and spur much larger companies located within Colorado and beyond to commit to fair opportunity hiring. As we drive this effort forward, a natural partnership is CDOC’s innovative Take TWO pilot program. This initiative increases opportunities for individuals to transition to employment outside of prison during the final months of their term of incarceration. To support this work, the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (“CDLE”) received funding from the U.S. Department of Labor’s Pathway Home grant program to assist the transition of justice-involved adults back into the workplace.

An ideal reentry support system would ensure everyone who leaves prison has the mindset, skills, community-based supports, resources, and fair access to employment opportunities necessary to find economic stability.

Given Colorado’s strong foundation, spirit of collaboration, and the significant opportunities to improve our reentry system, Colorado faces a unique moment of opportunity. Taking advantage of this opportunity requires centering community voices in the design of potential innovative solutions. For example, building on and replicating the success that CDOC has cultivated with the WAGEES program, building better connections across organizations, and serving reentering individuals effectively is of crucial importance to the work ahead. Likewise, pathways to employment and access to affordable housing and health services (including mental health and substance abuse services) must be addressed to improve reentry outcomes.

Increasing funding for effective programs and investing in innovative approaches will also be necessary to deepen their impact. A coordinated approach must also address the range of barriers that still exist, including the availability of key support services and the social stigma that exists around fair opportunity hiring.

The discussions convened by the Department as part of its review process underscored that interested stakeholders across the public, private, and civic/non-profit sectors are already doing extraordinary work and are prepared to seize this moment for collaboration in service of transformational change. In particular, the Department identified the opportunity for a public-private-civic partnership to:

- Invest new resources in programming that currently works and scale up such programs,
- Catalyze employers to embrace fair opportunity employment practices,
- Provide tools and resources to help committed employers effectively adopt best practices, and
- Pilot new ideas not currently underway in Colorado, such as transitional support, such as rental assistance, for those coming out of incarceration.

Under Attorney General Weiser's leadership, the Department of Law is committed to helping bring these partnerships to fruition. As a short-term priority, the Department of Law will focus its engagement in three areas: first, investing financial resources to expand the impact of proven and promising reentry service providers; second, developing a framework to support a network of fair opportunity employers in Colorado; and third, supporting CDOC's efforts to develop and expand innovative approaches to pre-release training, mentoring, and transitional work experiences.

II. The Department of Law's Efforts to Understand Existing Assets, Gaps, and Opportunities to Improve the Status Quo

In January 2020, Attorney General Weiser participated in a reentry stakeholder event at CrossPurpose, a Denver-based organization that offers career and community development programs to people with prior convictions. The CrossPurpose event featured stories from formerly incarcerated people and from community-based organizations and advocates that highlighted the significant challenges that people with prior criminal records often face in obtaining stable and fulfilling employment. These challenges are multifaceted but include the unnecessary barriers in hiring processes.

Following the CrossPurpose event, the Department of Law undertook an 18-month study and set of ongoing discussions with established community stakeholders in the public, private, and civic/non-profit sectors in Colorado and elsewhere to discuss the idea of catalyzing a network of employers in Colorado committed to adopting best practices for recruiting, hiring, and developing talent and ensuring individuals with prior criminal convictions have a fair chance at obtaining employment. As part of that effort, in December 2020, Attorney General Weiser hosted a roundtable to discuss fair opportunity employment ("Roundtable") for reentering Coloradans with multiple community stakeholders, including reentry support organizations, mission-aligned business leaders, representatives from relevant state government offices, charities and philanthropists, and potential fair opportunity employers. The Roundtable served as an opportunity for the Department to learn from the accumulated expertise of organizations working with Colorado's reentry ecosystem and to explore how the Department could help to fill existing gaps in Colorado's fair opportunity employment infrastructure. The Department also drew upon best practices set forth by the Society for Human Resource Management and from the corporate success stories of renowned second-chance employer Nehemiah Manufacturing Company and the Beacon of Hope Business Alliance in Cincinnati.

Through its initial research and conversations with stakeholders, the Department confirmed that, although access to employment opportunities is a central ingredient for effective reentry,

expanding access is a multifaceted challenge. It involves not only breaking down unjustified barriers erected by employers during and after the hiring process, but also increasing candidates' technical and relational skills prior to departing prison and navigating complex bureaucracies. And access to employment alone is not a silver bullet. Addressing the interrelated hardships such as discrimination in the housing market, limited access to transportation, and mental health challenges spurred by exposure to chronic trauma is also critical.

Ultimately, the Department concluded that it needed to undertake a comprehensive study of Colorado's reentry ecosystem to understand the feasibility and value of building a fair opportunity employer network. To facilitate this broad review, the Department partnered with Jason Mendelson as a volunteer Executive-in-Residence for reentry initiatives and contracted with an outside organization (Justice Reskill) to conduct a comprehensive review of the reentry ecosystem in Colorado. The review process involved communications with more than 100 reentry stakeholders, including previously incarcerated and justice-involved people, state government officials, and employers interested in adopting best practices for fair opportunity employment. The review process also included informational interviews with more than 25 community organizations that provide reentry services in Colorado.

III. Towards an Easy-to-Navigate Reentry Experience and “Prison-to-Employment Pathway” for Fair Opportunity Talent

The review highlighted the opportunity to invest in a “Prison-to-Employment Pathway” that would enable fair opportunity talent to obtain living-wage, dignity-affirming, career-building employment following their release from prison. In this Part, we discuss how to develop that pathway.

a. Build on existing infrastructure to strengthen coordination among service providers and CDOC to increase community and accessibility to reentry employment

Echoing the sentiment of participants at the Roundtable, the organizations interviewed during the review shared universal support for:

- Improved coordination among existing service providers,
- Improved coordination between CDOC departments, and
- Improved coordination between individual CDOC facilities and community-based organizations.

Stakeholders noted that there is opportunity for reentry organizations to coordinate services and respond to shared challenges. Available training, work opportunities, licenses, and other resources will only be widely utilized if individuals know how to access them. CDOC facilities also must work in close partnership to identify and implement which services are needed in specific facilities and tailor services to meet individual needs that could result in successful reentry.

Although resources are currently available to assist individuals through the reentry process, these resources may be disconnected from one another, can be poorly publicized due to barriers to successful and broad in-reach (that is where community organizations are able to work with currently incarcerated people), and may struggle to provide the full complement of information, skills, and support necessary for an individual’s successful reentry. As a result, talented individuals must at times surmount unnecessary hurdles simply to access the support services they need. This is true within the employment-specific context and within the broader

reentry space. Existing resource repositories provide some guidance, but multiple interviewees agreed that necessary next steps include a greater focus on developing highly coordinated and intentional efforts that unify the existing support infrastructure, break down walls between pre-release and post-release resources, fill existing resource gaps, and enable individuals to more easily navigate the reentry process.

The review highlighted the opportunity to invest in a “Prison-to-Employment Pathway” that would enable fair opportunity talent to obtain living-wage, dignity-affirming, career-building employment following their release from prison.

Colorado can build on its recent successes and could transform the reentry experience so that it is easier to navigate and equipped to meet individuals “where they are” upon release. The less complex the process, the more accessible it will be to those preparing for reentry and life post-incarceration. Giving Colorado a strong foundation to build on, the Latino Coalition for Community Leadership (“LCCL”) serves as a grantmaking intermediary, providing administrative oversight as well as leadership, resources, and capacity-building skills to help WAGEES partners meet the needs of their communities. The role of the LCCL is crucial, as it serves as a liaison and translator between state agencies and community partners to develop a coordinated initiative while providing capacity building and accountability. This model has successfully coordinated reentry initiatives among stakeholders through building trust, communication, and mutual accountability and serves as a framework to leverage larger networks of stakeholders to address reentry barriers.

Continuing to strengthen partnerships and trust among existing service providers and other stakeholders – including CDOC, parole officers, fair opportunity employers, and many others – is key to simplifying and unifying the reentry experience, specifically in the context of employment. Each person leaving prison has a unique backstory, particular needs, and a distinct set of skills and aspirations. But many face similar obstacles to reentering successfully, including immediate basic needs for food, clothing, shelter, and ultimately, a stable income and employment with dignity. Each person must navigate complex institutional processes to comply

with parole requirements, obtain driver's licenses and other government documents, and in many cases, start from scratch in terms of building a life. Often, people return to communities that have changed dramatically during their time served in prison.

Colorado has the opportunity to improve the reentry experience and create a national model. Along with private philanthropy, government entities with grantmaking authority and resources, such as the Department of Law, are well-positioned to deploy financial resources to invest in developing the capacity of effective programs.

b. Improve the front end of the “prison-to-employment pathway” by increasing access to pre-release technical training and transitional work

The review carefully considered opportunities for strengthening – and building new components of – what could be called a “prison-to-employment pathway” for fair opportunity talent reentering communities.

A review of the research and interviews with stakeholders reiterated the importance of technical training and transitional work opportunities. These opportunities position fair opportunity talent to compete well with job applicants who have more recent and relevant work experience. Research shows that participation in pre-release job and training programs is associated with higher rates of employment after reentry. Such training and work opportunities should be available early in the transition process, beginning many months, if not years, prior to release, enabling appropriate individuals to be better prepared to apply for jobs as soon as they reenter the community.

Ideally, a successful reentry process would start with backwards planning on the first day of incarceration. Too often, because of resource constraints and lack of coordination, the reentry preparation process does not begin until after an individual leaves prison. Although programs are currently available to assist in transitions from incarceration to employment, individuals whose first exposure to such programs occurs after release are at a significant disadvantage in their quest to immediately obtain career-building work. Moreover, those leaving prison may not know of those programs.

Investing in improved reentry programs promises dramatically improved outcomes. Providing life-readiness skills to individuals while incarcerated is critical and will better prepare them for the workforce. Simply providing the technical skills for a job will not set up an individual for success, as “soft skills” are also critical to success. Skills such as conflict resolution, financial literacy, health and wellness, and communication should occur either before or in conjunction with technical training.

Individuals whose first exposure to such programs occurs after release are at a significant disadvantage in their quest to immediately obtain career-building work and may well not know of those programs.

CDOC partners with community organizations to provide some combination of training in technical skills, professional norms, and relational competencies as well as mentorship behind the prison walls. However, the review found opportunity to deepen the involvement of community organizations, making them a fixture of the pre-release process. Doing so would require expanding the scope and scale of community programs by adding partners and lessening or removing barriers.

Barriers are numerous, but include issues related to access. For example, CDOC facilities in major metro areas benefit from more onsite programming in comparison to rural facilities where distance makes community involvement more difficult. Moreover, where formerly incarcerated individuals serve as mentors with organizations, they can struggle to gain access as facility volunteers, thereby diminishing important relationship-building opportunities.

To address these and other barriers, the review suggests that community-led programs should ensure that pre-release services are coordinated with post-release support needs and services. This includes investing in training, mentorship, and other activities specifically targeted at facilitating the transition from prison to community life. One promising way to prepare individuals for reentry employment opportunities is to provide access to transitional employment while individuals are still incarcerated. CDOC’s Take TWO Reentry Program, which is being piloted at the Buena Vista Correctional Complex, provides a compelling example of this

innovative and forward-thinking approach. The Take TWO program provides a select group of currently incarcerated individuals, who have been identified as posing a low public safety risk to the outside community and who are approaching the final duration of their sentence, to work day jobs for employers in the surrounding community and earn a prevailing or marketable wage while doing so. As described by CDOC, the Take TWO program enables incarcerated individuals to “have the opportunity to acquire some monetary savings prior to their release from the prison system, improve their job skills to make them more marketable and employable, and help re-establish a social network within the community.”

Pre-release employment programs such as Take TWO are a valuable framework for bolstering incarcerated individuals’ reentry employment prospects and for ensuring individuals prepare for reentry employment prior to leaving prison. Along with expanding access in Colorado prisons to high-quality skills training, life readiness programs, and mentorship, Colorado is also well positioned to explore the viability of expanding the Take TWO program or adopting similar public-private employment partnerships for incarcerated individuals.

c. Improve the back end of the “prison-to-employment pathway” by expanding adoption of fair opportunity employment practices

Transitional work experience and training in technical skills and other competencies should not simply prepare fair opportunity talent for low-paying or unskilled jobs. Rather, the prison-to-employment pathway should be designed to funnel talented individuals into dignity-affirming work environments that pay a living wage that will support families and provide opportunities for advancement towards higher-level career positions and enable them to live thriving lives.

Talented individuals will remain underemployed if employers are unwilling to give fair opportunities to justice-involved Coloradans.

Creating pathways to these career-building fields requires both expanding pre-release training and transitional work opportunities to provide a steady supply of well-prepared talent (see subsection b. above) and employers’ willingness to hire, develop, and promote talent into skill-based roles. Talented individuals will remain underemployed if employers are unwilling to

give fair opportunities to justice-involved Coloradans. Therefore, growing the breadth and depth of employers' commitment to fair opportunity employment remains an essential component of a robust prison-to-employment pathway and reentry service ecosystem – and one that is significantly underdeveloped in Colorado. The scholarly literature, and conversations with justice-involved individuals, reentry support organizations, and various employers, point to many reasons employers in Colorado may not currently use practices that provide a fair opportunity to justice-involved individuals, along with suggested approaches to address this challenge.

COMMUNICATING THE “WHY” FOR FAIR OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYMENT

Many employers are unaware of the compelling business case for adopting fair opportunity employment practices. Interested stakeholders must clearly communicate the “why” – i.e. the tangible business advantages – of hiring fair opportunity talent. As a general starting point, because roughly one-third of working-age adults in the U.S. having a conviction history, engaging in fair opportunity hiring gives employers access to a deep and underutilized pool of talent. Furthermore, studies show that when individuals with prior convictions are given the opportunity, they are hardworking, effective, and loyal employees with longer job tenures and lower rates of quitting, which reduces turnover costs for their employers. More than four out of five managers indicate that the value new employees with criminal records bring to their organizations is as high or higher than that of workers without records.

Consider, for example, the case of Nehemiah Manufacturing Company, a renowned second-chance employer and subject of a Harvard Business School case study. In this case, individuals with criminal records were much less likely to quit their place of employment than are people without criminal records. As the case study explained, this unusual degree of job loyalty saves employers financial and human resources by reducing the need to expend resources recruiting and training new employees. Successful businesses like Nehemiah – and Dave's Killer Bread, which has also experienced great success with this model – demonstrate that embracing fair opportunity employment practices is clearly compatible with achieving traditional metrics of business success.

DEVELOPING A FAIR OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER NETWORK

Businesses may be open to adopting fair opportunity employment practices but, as discussed in greater detail below, they often lack the necessary information and resources to do so effectively. In our conversations, we found a consensus among existing reentry stakeholders regarding the need to formalize a peer network of businesses that publicly commit to provide talented justice-involved individuals, including those individuals who are reentering, with fair opportunities for employment and support towards career advancement. Such a network would require partnerships with CDOC transitional work programs and with reentry service providers to ensure businesses receive the training and support they need to succeed as fair opportunity employers; spur continuous learning and sharing among peer employers about best practices for hiring, developing, and retaining fair opportunity talent; and bring attention to the benefits of fair opportunity employment for employers, talent, and the broader community.

Creating a formal network is important because of the significant share of small business employers in Colorado. Large businesses can play a vital role by demonstrating responsible corporate leadership as fair opportunity employers, and they have the resources and management capacity to do so. But large businesses will never be able to provide enough jobs, nor an adequately diverse array of jobs, for the entire pool of fair opportunity talent in Colorado. Small businesses – which are better positioned to collectively employ a majority of Colorado’s fair opportunity talent – may lack the institutional resources and awareness to identify, connect with, and support fair opportunity recruits. Committed employers of all sizes face logistical complications when instituting fair opportunity employment practices. A strong employer network could help to overcome such hurdles by integrating these businesses into a robust reentry ecosystem and increasing the number of direct partnerships with reentry service providers and CDOC’s reentry programs.

One hurdle in instituting fair opportunity employment practices is that employers not only worry about their own ability to provide adequate onboarding, training, and a supportive work environment conducive to fostering the success of fair opportunity talent, but also worry about whether fair opportunity talent will have access to reentry support services. Employers

may shy away from hiring fair opportunity talent because they are unsure whether they can retain fair opportunity talent without fulfilling these wraparound needs. Similarly, unfamiliarity with how to effectively engage in fair chance hiring and latent societal stigma towards individuals with criminal records likely holds back employers.

Small businesses—which are better positioned to collectively employ a majority of Colorado’s fair opportunity talent—may lack the institutional resources and awareness to identify, connect with, and support fair opportunity recruits.

To overcome these challenges, a fair opportunity employer network will ensure that both employers and employees are supported by the broader reentry ecosystem. Knowing that Colorado’s extraordinary community-based reentry organizations with proven track records of success will provide transition services and mentorship for employees and be available to troubleshoot challenges in real time can assuage employers’ concerns about their own lack of resources. Additionally, many of these community-based reentry organizations provide certificates upon graduating or completing certain courses that can be valuable in the eyes of an employer. Conversations with staff at CDOC confirmed the merits of this approach, as current employers of fair opportunity talent sometimes affirmatively connect their employees who need support services with community partners like the WAGEES organizations. By increasing the number of and strength of these relationships between employers and reentry service providers, a fair opportunity employer network will reduce transaction costs and reassure fair opportunity employers that their employees will have access to wraparound support services from day one.

An employer network could also develop and disseminate resources and offer trainings to prepare member businesses to recruit, hire, develop, and retain fair opportunity talent. Fortunately, many useful resources are already available. For instance, the SHRM’s *Getting Talent Back to Work Toolkit* and Checkr’s *The Diversity Group You’re Overlooking: How to be a Fair Chance Employer* are “grab-and-go” guides for adopting fair opportunity employment practices. A network of fair opportunity employers could supplement these best practices with

additional assistance informed by the experiences of the network's members and tailored to dynamics of Colorado's business environment and reentry ecosystem.

A second hurdle is that employers interested in hiring fair opportunity talent may not know where to go to recruit or target such talent. Again, a robust employer network could alleviate this problem by partnering with CDOC and reentry organizations to connect fair opportunity jobseekers with open positions early in the recruiting process and by establishing searchable resumé banks – or, more ambitiously, an online talent platform – showcasing fair opportunity candidates.

A third hurdle is that employers are likely to pass over candidates who lack the skills and competencies required for in-demand roles. Consequently, as business needs evolve over time, pre-release training for fair opportunity talent must evolve in tandem. As discussed above, it is vital to expand access to effective pre-release technical training and transitional work opportunities on the front end of the prison-to-employment pathway. But such training is only effective if it provides the technical expertise required for in-demand, career-building jobs in relevant industries. To align the needs of hiring employers and the skills of fair opportunity talent, employers in Colorado – such as those in the planned employer network – should be regularly consulted about the most important skillsets to be included in pre-release training curricula. This type of collaboration between private sector employers, civic/non-profit sector training providers, and public sector entities like CDOC promises to foster a virtuous cycle that exemplifies the benefits of a more integrated reentry ecosystem and the promise of a “prison-to-employment pathway.” Employers will have access to fair opportunity talent equipped with the precise skillset they seek, and fair opportunity employees will be well-suited to obtain career-building employment and avoid reoffending.

IV. Conclusion and Next Steps for the Department of Law

Improving reentry outcomes for the approximately 8,500 individuals who leave prison every year is part of Attorney General Phil Weiser’s and the Department of Law’s commitment to improving Colorado’s criminal justice system. When these individuals obtain stable, career-building jobs and successfully meet their own and their family’s basic needs, our communities become safer, families grow stronger, and all Coloradans benefit from a more dynamic economy.

Under Attorney General Weiser’s leadership, the Department of Law will continue to collaborate with reentry stakeholders from across the public, private, and civic/non-profit sections. We will work with partners from CDOC to the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce to the Second Chance Center and other exemplary community-based reentry providers. Together we will strengthen our reentry ecosystem and develop a “prison-to-employment pathway” that engages fair opportunity talent and employers to increase successful reentry employment – and successful reentry itself. The opportunity to make further progress in this space is a direct result of the hard work and passion that community-based organizations, service providers, and passionate individuals from a variety of agencies have devoted to this work in recent years.

As a short-term priority, the Department of Law will focus its engagement in three areas: first, investing financial resources to expand the impact of proven and promising reentry service providers; second, developing a framework to undergird a network of fair opportunity employers in Colorado; and third, supporting CDOC’s efforts to develop and expand innovative approaches to pre-release training, mentoring, and transitional work experiences.

When these individuals obtain stable, career-building jobs and successfully meet their own and their family’s basic needs, our communities become safer, families grow stronger, and all Coloradans benefit from a more dynamic economy.



