

04/26/2019

The Honorable Marco Rubio  
Chairman  
U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business  
& Entrepreneurship  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Benjamin L. Cardin  
Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business  
& Entrepreneurship  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Rubio and Ranking Member Cardin:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we are writing to express our support for the *NEW START Act of 2019* (S. 1077). We are grateful to Senator Cardin for this important legislation, which creates a reentry program within the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) to award grants to organizations, or partnerships between organizations, to provide business counseling and entrepreneurial development training to returning citizens.

Every year, more than 600,000 people are released from prisons and studies by the Department of Justice have found high rates of recidivism among released prisoners. One of the primary drivers of high recidivism rates is the inability for returning citizens to find a job – up to 60 percent of ex-offenders remain unemployed one year after their release. Entrepreneurial development programs for formerly incarcerated individuals report dramatically lower rates of recidivism, and self-employment can provide economic stability for those who are otherwise locked out of the labor market.

This legislation is a critical next step after the bipartisan passage of the *FIRST STEP Act* last year, and builds upon the successes of programs across the country that have successfully deployed entrepreneurial development to reduce recidivism by helping returning citizens secure employment and start businesses.

Our organizations serve America's small business community and our members work everyday to help aspiring entrepreneurs, particularly women and minorities, gain the necessary skills and capital needed to start a business. Entrepreneurship offers the key to accessing meaningful opportunities and allows individuals to forge their own path and craft their own futures. This is particularly important for returning citizens who may face difficulty re-entering the workforce. As our organizations primarily serve the socially and economically disadvantaged, we believe this bill will have a positive effect on the communities we serve, giving returning citizens a fair shot at economic stability.

When returning citizens come home after paying their debt to society, it is our job to equip them with the tools they need to rebuild their lives. Our organizations collectively call on Congress to pass the *NEW START Act*, which will give returning citizens another tool in their reentry toolkit and reduce recidivism.

Sincerely,

Association for Enterprise Opportunity  
Association of Women's Business Centers  
National Small Business Association  
U.S. Black Chambers, Inc.