



April 29, 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 JustLeadershipUSA, I am writing to express our support for the *NEW START Act of 2019* (S. 1077), introduced by Ranking Member Cardin, which creates a 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 people returning home from incarceration.

Every year, more than 600,000 people are released from prisons. They face myriad barriers that create a second punitive sentence that follows them for life, long after they have completed their court-ordered sentence. These barriers that affect employment, housing, health, and access to other basic life necessities and rights create unlivable conditions that force formerly incarcerated people to the margins of society with little hope of being able to meaningfully fulfill their innate potential. Studies by the Department of Justice have found high rates of people returning to prison within just a few years of returning home. One of the primary drivers of these returns to prison is the inability for formerly incarcerated people to find a job – up to 60 percent of formerly incarcerated people remain unemployed one year after their release. Furthermore, in the first full year after release, 49 percent of formerly incarcerated people earn less than \$500; 32 percent of people earn between \$500-\$15,000; and only 20 percent earn more than \$15,000. They will also face more than 37,000 employment related occupational licensing barriers that lock them out of the workforce and from obtaining employment, even when qualified and sought-after by employers. Entrepreneurial development programs for formerly incarcerated individuals offer them the resources to begin their own business as a means to earn a livelihood. These entrepreneurial programs also help dramatically lower rates of future system involvement, and self-employment can provide economic stability for those who are otherwise locked out of the labor market.

#halfby2030

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This legislation is an important step for providing formerly incarcerated people and people with convictions an opportunity for a working future. This program will build upon the foundation of programs across the country that have successfully deployed entrepreneurial development to help lift people up and strengthen communities by helping directly impacted people secure employment and start businesses.

Additionally, many formerly incarcerated people come from Black, brown, or immigrant communities that are typically under-resourced even before people are removed from the community due to incarceration. Investing in entrepreneurial opportunities for people coming home does more than give people a chance – it strengthens communities that should never have been made weak in the first place.

JustLeadershipUSA supports the *NEW START Act* because all people deserve the right to work and to earn a living wage. JustLeadershipUSA's #WORKINGfuture campaign focuses specifically on removing barriers that hinder and eliminate a person's ability to succeed after a conviction. The #WORKINGfuture campaign is led by people with records who are organizing to challenge and remove the devastating policies that exclude them from employment, food access, housing, voting, and other basic human and civil rights. We believe that everyone deserves access to affordable basic services, safety in their communities, and dignity in their lives — no matter where they live or what their record states. And investing in people's leadership is central not just to that campaign, but to the overall mission of JustLeadershipUSA, as well.

When formerly incarcerated people come home after their incarceration, it is our job to equip them with the tools they need to rebuild their lives. JustLeadershipUSA calls on Congress to pass the *NEW START Act*, which will give formerly incarcerated people another tool in their reentry toolkit, strengthen communities, and put communities on a path toward healing and true public safety.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'DeAnna Hoskins', written in a cursive style.

DeAnna Hoskins
President and CEO
JustLeadershipUSA