



**NEWS RELEASE**  
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## **New Jersey Advisory Committee to the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights Announces Release of Report on Criminal Records and Access to Occupational Licenses in New Jersey**

Washington, DC – The 2017-2021 New Jersey Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights issued a [report](#) about its examination of the substantial barriers that prevent formerly incarcerated individuals from accessing occupational licenses. With the assistance of national and New Jersey experts, the Committee conducted five virtual panel briefings in 2020 and 2021. Members learned, that although all formerly incarcerated people are not prevented from obtaining occupational licenses, too many are unable to (a) complete the extensive training necessary to obtain a license, (b) pay the exorbitant cost of training and fees, and (c) navigate the complexities of broad licensing statutes, which too often are arbitrarily applied. Moreover, far too many people of color are caught in the web of the criminal justice system and lack the opportunities necessary and the support required to successfully reintegrate into society.

Lawmakers, public officials, community organizations, and members of the public should work together to ensure that formerly incarcerated people are able to the fullest possible access to employment. As the report shows, that will requires increased coordination among government agencies and extensive data collection, as well as rigorous protections for people with criminal histories. More fundamental change may also be advisable: perhaps the time has come for a robust discussion about whether an alternative regulatory regime, such as compliance inspections, instead of licensing restrictions, can expand access to post-conviction employment while adequately protecting the the health and welfare of consumers.

The Committee offers a number of recommendations to state agencies, and law and policy makers—discussed in detail at pages 22-28 of the [report](#)—to further reduce the barriers to occupational licenses even beyond the legislation recently enacted, including increased education that prepares individuals to qualify for state licensing requirements; reduced/modified alternatives to license fees; a more user-friendly system for applicants; and greater coordination, data collection and transparency among and by state agencies and licensing boards. Implementing these recommendations are essential steps toward assuring economic stability and success for formerly incarcerated people, all in the interest of a fairer, more equal and more forgiving society, without sacrificing public safety.

“I extend my deepest appreciation to the 2017-2021 Committee members who represent diverse occupational skills and points of view; all have a shared commitment to civil rights in New Jersey and , I am pleased to report, unanimously supported this report,” said Lawrence S. Lustberg, Committee Chair. He noted that, “I know that policy and law makers at every level in our state are aware of the Committee’s civil rights review and look forward to the Report’s findings and recommendations, which the Committee sincerely hopes results in meaningful regulatory and legislative reform.”

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The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, established by the Civil Rights Act of 1957, is the only independent, bipartisan agency charged with advising the President and Congress on civil rights and reporting annually on federal civil rights enforcement. Our 56 state Advisory Committees—50 States, District of Columbia and American Territories—offer a broad perspective on civil rights concerns at state and local levels. For information about the reports and meetings of the Commission and its Advisory Committees, please visit <http://www.usccr.gov> and follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).