

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE REPORT
2024 Legislative Session

Reference No.: CB-006-2024
Draft No.: 2
Committee: Health, Human Services, and Public Safety
Date: October 17, 2024.
Action: FAV (A)

REPORT:

Committee Vote: Favorable, with Amendments 5-0 (In favor Council Members Fisher, Blegay, Hawkins, Olson, and Watson)

The Health, Human Services, and Public Safety Committee met on October 17, 2024, to consider CB-006-2024.

The Committee Chair turned to the Legislative Attorney to summarize the revisions in CB-006-2024 Draft 2. Draft 2 proposes significant changes from Draft 1, including a new title: the Prince George's County Reentry Employment Incentive Program, previously known as the Reentry Program.

In the proposed Draft 2, the previous subtitle 16 regarding personnel has been removed. It is now Subtitle 10 on Finance and Taxation, specifically in sections 10-334, and adding sections 10-334.01 and 10-334.02. The proposed Draft 2 changes the Draft 1 title to the "Prince George's County Reentry Employment Incentive Program, previously known as the Reentry Program.

The County Reentry Employment Incentive Program has been established, replacing the previous Reentry Employment Reimbursement Program referenced under Section 10-334. The new program includes definitions and corresponding definitions and establishes the Reentry Employment Incentive Fund mentioned in Subsection C of the revised Section 10-334.

Section 10-334.01 details the Reentry Incentive Program. This is the private sector employment incentive section, which covers the various responsibilities that Employee Prince Georges and the qualified employer will have.

Section 10-334.02 identifies the reporting requirements that must be met. Additionally, a minor change is needed here at the bottom. This will be the new Section 3 – the uncodified Section – and the new Section 4, stating that the law shall take effect 45 calendar days after it is enacted.

From her initial review, Dinora Hernandez, Office of Law stated that establishing such a program is within our authority. She requested additional time to review it, saying it appears to be in proper legislative form.

Ms. Sakinda Skinner, Council Liaison, Office of the County Executive, stated that Mr. Walter Simmons, Employ Prince George's, attended the initial committee meeting, and there were questions. Clarification was sought on the legislation's intent, but no position was taken. After reviewing Draft 2, the position remains the same; there are no significant changes, and since government agencies are already funded, additional incentives are unnecessary. The Office of Human Resources & Management (OHRM) was referenced in the previous legislation but was removed from the proposed Draft 2.

Council Member Oriadha stated that the proposed changes in Draft 2 aim to address the underutilized incentive program for hiring returning citizens with private sector reluctance to participate. The Pathway to Government Program also faces funding challenges. The proposed changes aim to address this by allowing government agencies to participate in the incentive program and leveraging unused resources. Adjustments were made to remove references to OHRM, eliminate the creation of a separate fund, and allow the program to be used by both private sector and government agencies.

The Co-Proposer, Vice Chair Hawkins, emphasized the importance of everything Council Member Oriadha mentioned, highlighting that these points are crucial to achieving the goals of supporting returning citizens.

After discussion, the Health, Human Services, and Public Safety Committee voted 5-0 favorable on CB-006-2024 Draft 2.

The Health, Human Services, and Public Safety Committee convened on April 4, 2024, to consider CB-006-2024. The legislation establishes a Reentry Preferred Hiring Fund and the Reentry Preferred Hiring Program.

Amanda Dennison, Legislative Attorney, explained that amendments and changes to CB-006-2024 are still being worked out. While some information has been exchanged between the Council and the Administration, a final decision on the language has yet to be reached. Ms. Dennison suggested holding the bill for further discussion.

Council Member Hawkins motioned to hold and was seconded by Council Member Watson.

CB-006-2024 was further discussed in a subsequent Health, Human Services, and Public Safety Committee meeting on March 21, 2024.

The Health, Human Services, and Public Safety convened on March 21, 2024, to consider CB-006-2024.

CB-006-2024 proposes the establishment of the Reentry Preferred Hiring Fund and the Reentry Preferred Hiring Program. The Reentry Preferred Hiring Fund will allocate a portion of county funds for hiring individuals with nonviolent criminal offenses. The funding is for the employment of twenty individuals. After the year probation period, the employee's position and funding will be placed in the corresponding agency, department, or office's budget.

The Reentry Preferred Hiring Program will provide for the county hiring of non-violent ex-offenders, which the Director of Human Resources Management will oversee. This Program will apply to all County agencies, departments, and offices. However, the Director of Human Resources Management has the authority to make necessary adjustments if it is determined that hiring county residents with prior incarceration or nonviolent offense convictions would jeopardize public safety and security.

The Director of Human Resources Management shall provide an annual report to the County Executive and County Council on the Program and Fund for the previous fiscal year on or before December 31st of each year.

The Legislative Budget and Policy Analyst provided background information on the legislation and the fiscal impact. Mr. Moody indicated that the enactment of CB-006-2024 is likely to have an adverse fiscal impact on the County in the form of additional expenditures related to administrative expenses associated with managing the Program. Council staff does not believe that program management would require a further position and has yet to receive any information from the administration indicating it would. Also, the bill does require that \$500,000 per year be appropriated to the Fund. However, to the extent the Fund is used to pay for existing positions that would otherwise be paid for as general-funded compensation, it does not represent an additional expenditure. To the extent that new positions are created expressly to use the fund, these would represent an adverse fiscal impact in the form of extra spending.

Further, the enactment of CB-006-2024 could have a potentially favorable impact on the County by assisting those returning from incarceration with integrating into society more efficiently and potentially reducing dependence on social services and reoccurring offenders.

The bill sponsor, Council Member Oriadha, explained her efforts to promote reentry job opportunities for returning citizens with government agencies. We currently have a reentry hiring program that focuses on those financial incentives for the private sector. Including a set aside in the existing reentry hiring program for government, positions are crucial in aligning actions with goals and ensuring support for the population. The Administration has committed to discussing and outlining the proposed change.

Sakinda Skinner, County Council Liaison's Office of the County Executive, stated that the Administration supports the bill's intent. However, she is looking to receive the revisions from Council Member Oriadha and will be better able to determine the Administration's position. The county has a Returning Citizens Affairs Division and programs like Pathway to Government. It also supports legislation sponsored by Council Members Franklin and Hawkins, incentivizing businesses to hire returning citizens.

Walter Simmons, CEO & President of Employ Prince George's, provided information on the county's re-entry programs, Pathways to Success and Government. It was determined that non-competitive positions could be identified and provided a preference for Prince George's County's justice-involved residents. Mr. Simmons shared information on the successful placements of returning citizens in various county government positions, including both blue-collar and white-collar roles.

Leara Davis gave public testimony in support of the bill. She shared her personal experience and perspective, highlighting the importance of second chances and opportunities for individuals facing challenges in the justice system.

Quiana Johnson, Founder and Executive Director of Life After Release, Co-Founder of Harry's Wildest Dreams, and member of the National Council of Incarcerated and Formally Incarcerated Women and Girls, spoke in support of CB-006-2024 due to its codification, enabling it to complement the other county programs effectively.

Ms. Nicole Harrison spoke in support of CB-006-2024, sharing her personal experiences and highlighting the complexities and challenges individuals face during reentry, especially regarding qualifications and access to opportunities.

The passing of this legislation will provide equitable resources to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for formerly incarcerated individuals.

The Chief Legislative Officer said that if the Chair is willing to bring this bill back in two weeks, we will prepare draft two, incorporating the necessary amendments to capture the bill's actual intent.

Council Member Olson made a motion, seconded by Blegay, to hold for two weeks to collaborate with the Administration on amendments. The motion passed 4-0.