

# PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY COUNCIL

## COMMITTEE REPORT

2021 Legislative Session

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**Reference No.:** CB-019-2021

**Draft No.:** 2

**Committee:** Committee of the Whole

**Date:** 4/13/2021

**Action:** Favorable (A)

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**REPORT:** Favorable as amended, 11-0: Council Members Hawkins, Anderson-Walker, Davis, Dernoga, Franklin, Glaros, Harrison, Ivey, Streeter, Taveras and Turner.

The Prince George's County Council convened on March 9, 2021 and was presented with CB-019-2021 which was referred to the Committee of the Whole on April 1, 2021 and held in committee. CB-019-2021, an act concerning the Prince George's County Re-entry Employment Incentive Program, establishes an incentive to encourage Prince George's County employers to hire County residents returning from incarceration. If approved, the bill would create a new program in Division 27, of the County Code, Under Section 10-334 of the County Code, which identifies the establishment of terms including Qualifying Employee, Qualifying Employer, Qualifying Position and Incarcerated and determines program eligibility.

Although the number of Qualifying Employers has not been determined, as written, reimbursement to each Qualifying Employer, per Qualified Position, could be five dollars (\$5) per hour with a maximum of up to 1,000 hours or \$5,000 over a twelve (12) month period.

Similar legislation, CB-028-2020 was presented, discussed and held in Committee on September 29, 2020. During the presentation the Office of Finance suggested the responsibility of administering the program should be that of another agency. CB-019-2021 addresses the suggestion and it was determined that Employ Prince George's would serve as that agency, however, discretion is ultimately left to the County Executive. Disbursement of funds would be monitored in conjunction with Employ Prince George's and issued through the Director of Finance.

The Office of the County Executive also expressed general support and some concern about the fiscal impact of CB-028-2020 during the meeting on September 29, 2020. Therefore, CB-019-2021 addresses this by adding language that states if sufficient funds are not available, the Director of Finance shall not approve the Re-entry Employment Reimbursement Program Agreement for the employee.

During the discussion, one of the bill's sponsors, Council Member Franklin, detailed extensive work with stakeholders to refine the legislation during the last two legislative years. He stated that this is the time to ensure that returning citizens have a path back into society. The Prince George's County Re-entry Employment Incentives program is patterned after a successful program in Philadelphia, PA and it is essentially in the same form.

Council Members deliberated over the legislation and as a result, Council Member Turner inquired about the possibility that the fiscal impact could be mitigated with the successful pursuit of Federal and or State funds and Member's agreed that is a viable financial possibility; Council Member Franklin

moved to hold the legislation to allow additional time to review the most recent draft (Draft 2), and Council Member Hawkins thanked the administration for working closely.

The Office of Law suggested amendments for CB-019-2021 which were included in Draft 2. and that 24 months shall be the term a member can be a member of the program and with the additional requirement of an annual report each year.

Council Legislative staff provided language improvements by consolidating and clarifying the responsibilities of Employ Prince George's.

The Policy Analysis and Fiscal Note states that the enactment of CB-019-2021 could have a potentially positive indirect fiscal impact in the form of cost savings related to services typically provided to unemployed individuals seeking gainful employment.

The Office of the County Executive expressed support.

After discussion, the Prince George's County Council, sitting as the Committee of the Whole, voted to hold CB-019-2021, 11-0.

The Prince George's County Council met as the Committee of the Whole on April 13, 2021 to discuss CB-019-2021. Amanda Dennison, Associate County Attorney, Office of Law, reviewed the amendments. The main amendment on page 3 puts a cap on how much the employer can receive for an employee for up to the first 12 months.

After further discussion of amendments agreement consolidated around 24 months as the requirement.

Council members suggested that a reporting mechanism is added or a cap with the report be due at the beginning of each calendar year.

Walter Simmons of Employ Prince George's said that this is an economic development issue. Citizens returning from incarceration can contribute to the growth of Prince George's County. We are number two in the state of Maryland for the number of returning citizens. Considering we will have thousands returning, this is important, even considering budget constraints.

Many of the larger employers that do hire returning citizens have a greater retention. Some employers are better than others and may try and take advantage. In response to a question about how this will actually function it was noted by Mr. Simmons that an employer hires a returning citizen and then applies for reimbursement during the period of time identified in the bill. This is an improvement over tax credit programs which have been ineffective because of the delay in refunding employers. This would enable payments of \$5 per hour for a qualifying employee. Each employee must complete a 90-day probationary period and then the payments may be received. Mr. Simmons noted that there are not many programs like this, and Prince George's will be a leader nationally in creating an ecosystem to decrease recidivism if this bill is enacted. Council members suggested that businesses receiving support from the County should perhaps have a greater responsibility to support this program.

After further discussion, the Prince George's County Council, sitting as the Committee of the Whole, voted CB-019-2021 out favorable, as amended, 11- 0.