



# Newsletter

February 2025  
Volume 5, Issue 2

## Inside this issue

- Second Chance at Success.....2-4
- Mat-Su Reentry Events.....3
- Knik Tribe Events.....3
- Mat-Su Job Center Update...5
- Monthly Highlight of Resources in the Mat-Su.....5

## Juneau Legislative Fly-In Held Jan 26 - Jan 29, 2025

I had the pleasure of participating in the Legislative Fly-In held in Juneau last month, which was sponsored by the Alaska Reentry Partnership, <https://www.akreentry.org/>.

We began our week with a group dinner on Sunday. It was great to see individuals from all around Alaska that are as passionate about reentry and reducing recidivism as I am.

On Monday, January 27th, Teri Tibbett, the Alaska Reentry Partnership Coordinator, held a day-long Advocacy Training. At this training we were taught the best ways to tell our stories to legislators in the time that is allotted.



*Sam Garcia, Barbara Mongar, Sen. Shelley Hughes, and Don Habeger (Left to right).*

All day Tuesday and Wednesday morning we participated in meetings with policy makers at the State Capitol. We got to talk to several of our Senators, including Sen. Shelley Hughes, and other Mat-Su legislators such as Representative Jubilee Underwood, Representative Elxie Moore, Representative DeLena Johnson and Representative Cathy Tilton about issues regarding incarcerated individuals and supporting them on their reentry journey.

One of the Legislative Aides that participated in the event stated, "The reentry simulation was incredibly powerful and well-executed. Thank you for allowing me to participate!"

I also want to thank all the people that helped us execute this event. We had approximately 18 volunteers, to include Commissioner Jen Winkelman and several of her staff from Alaska DOC.

This is the first year I have been able to participate in the Legislative Fly-In and I was very impressed on how smoothly it all went. I would like to thank the Alaska Reentry Partnership for putting this all together. I would also like to encourage any organization that supports reentry to participate in this annual Fly-In. I look forward to doing it again in 2026.

**Barbara Mongar,**  
**Coordinator, Mat-Su Reentry Coalition**



*Participants of the 2025 Legislative Fly-In. Barbara Mongar, Don Habeger, Rob Fetter, Christina Shadura, Sam Garcia, Teri Tibbett, and Katie Cowgill (Left to right)*

Then on Wednesday afternoon I assisted the Juneau Reentry Coalition with their Reentry Simulation. We had approximately 34 people participate in the simulation, including several representatives and legislative staff.



*Participants at the Juneau Reentry Simulation trying to complete all their weekly tasks before time runs out.*

# Second Chance at Success

By: Guest Author Lincoln Garrick / Nov 13, 2024 / [Second Chance at Success - Alaska Business Magazine](#)

Forty-four months is the median criminal sentence length in Alaska, according to 2023 data from the US Sentencing Commission. That's 1,320 days, which is a significant chunk of any life to put on hold, and it also creates a work résumé with an almost four-year gap. Alaska releases around 7,000 people annually from its correctional facilities, people who have spent time reflecting on mistakes and gaining skills to get prepared for reentry into the Alaska workforce to live again within our community.

## Incarceration Perspective

More than 5,000 people are currently incarcerated in Alaska's justice system, and many more are tracked under electronic monitoring, parole, probation, or in halfway houses. The state's incarceration rate is 718 per 100,000 people, as compiled by the Prison Policy Initiative in the report *Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2024*. This is higher than both the US national average of 531 per 100,000 and all other countries, with El Salvador coming in closest at 605 per 100,000, according to a January 2024 study by global research firm Statista.



Photo Credit: Wolfhound911 | iStock

However, incarcerated does not mean convicted and sentenced. According to data from the Alaska Justice Information Center, roughly half of Alaska Department of Corrections (ADOC) facilities contain individuals awaiting trial and who do not yet have a criminal record.

A criminal record, not to be confused with an arrest or police record, is a record of a person's criminal history, and it is established only when a person is convicted. While a period of incarceration is generally finite, a criminal record can follow people for their whole lives. Criminal records are often viewed as "collateral consequences," describing the various unexpected ways in which state and federal laws put individuals with criminal convictions at a disadvantage when trying to participate in everyday activities, including employment.

The Alaska criminal justice system touches the lives of more than 70 percent of residents, either directly or through someone they know. More than 200,000 Alaskans have a criminal record, which is close to one third of the state's population, according to the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DOLWD) Workforce Investment Board. Reentry and reintegration, the path to rebuilding a life after prison with gainful employment, is often paved with obstacles such as limited job opportunities, a lack of recent skills, and the added burden of facing discrimination.

## Changing Views on Criminal Records

Laws are increasingly protecting applicants from discrimination based on past criminal history. "Ban the box" laws in thirty-seven states, but not Alaska, prevent employers from asking about convictions on applications, while the Fair Chance to Compete for Jobs Act of 2019 requires federal employers and federal contractors to wait until later in the hiring process to consider criminal background checks. According to the National Employment Law Project, an additional 150 cities and counties have similar protections for both public and private sector jobs.

Unlike many states, Alaska lacks a comprehensive statute governing the use of criminal background checks in employment and licensing decisions. This means individual employers and licensing boards have greater discretion in evaluating the relevance of an applicant's criminal record to a position or profession. Consequently, professional licenses may be denied or revoked based on a conviction, but the specific criteria for such decisions may vary greatly. For instance, a criminal conviction, whether misdemeanor or felony, will not automatically disqualify or exclude someone from employment with the State of Alaska, but all convictions, even if the sentence is suspended or if the conviction has been set aside or expunged, must be disclosed at the time of application.

Organizations such as the Alaska Reentry Partnership—a collaboration of individuals, organizations, community advocates, and public entities—provide services before, during, and after incarceration—including transition support, therapeutic courts, cultural support, and employment assistance. Jonathan Pistotnik, reentry program manager for ADOC, states, "The Reentry Partnership brings together organizations and people with lived experience to use resources more efficiently and coordinate efforts across multiple organizations, better serving our big state." **(Continued on Page 3)**



## Second Chance at Success (Continued from Page 2)

Advocating for criminal disclosure changes may be on the horizon. In 2024, Governor Mike Dunleavy formally proclaimed April “Second Chance Month.” He urged all Alaskans “to recognize the need for closure for those who have paid their debt, to commend those who have successfully reentered society, and for individuals, employers, congregations, and communities to extend second chances to former inmates.”

### Employers’ Viewpoint

According to the nonprofit Jails to Jobs, there are significant advantages to hiring individuals who were formerly incarcerated, for both businesses and society as a whole. Formerly incarcerated individuals can bring much value to the workplace. They may possess transferable skills gained through work or training programs during their incarceration. A strong work ethic and dedication to start over can make them reliable and committed employees. Companies that hire formerly incarcerated individuals benefit from increased diversity and a more inclusive workplace. This can lead to improved decision-making and a stronger company culture.

Additionally, such companies demonstrate a commitment to social responsibility, which can enhance their reputation in the community. Industries facing labor shortages can fill critical gaps by hiring formerly incarcerated individuals. DOLWD also provides financial incentives, in some cases, for hiring these individuals through the Work Opportunity Tax Credit program.

Companies that actively hire workers who were formerly incarcerated are sometimes self-identified as “second chance employers,” and they include a variety of sizes and industries ranging from restaurants and temporary employment agencies to professional services and manufacturers.

Indeed.com, the popular job search website, has been a champion for second chances since its beginning twenty years ago. Its very first employee, a software engineer, had a past prison sentence and internet ban. Indeed’s CEO Chris Hyams has said, “We wouldn’t be where we are today if our founders hadn’t been open to hiring someone who made a mistake, learned from it, and served their time.” Which may influence Indeed’s approach today of focusing on skills and qualifications first, only considering criminal records later in the hiring process, if at all. It also takes the time to understand a person’s situation—what happened, when it happened, and if it has anything to do with the job itself.

### Working to Reduce Recidivism

Decades of research illustrate a clear link between gainful employment and reduced recidivism, but the relationship is layered. Academic theories suggest employment strengthens social bonds, fosters a positive self-image incompatible with crime, and provides financial stability acting as deterrents. However, the quality of work matters, and employment might follow, not precede, shifts in criminal behavior.

Alaska-specific research conducted by Juneau economist Yuancie Lee, a collaboration between ADOC and DOLWD, followed 4,500 inmates who were released from an Alaska prison in 2012. The wage values in the study were nominal and include 2012 through 2015 values. All of the subjects had served time for a felony, and the study analyzed employment’s effect on recidivism over three years. In the June 2017 issue of Alaska Economic Trends, Lee published the following findings:

- About half the former Alaskan inmates studied found a job at some point in the three years after their release.
- There were lower re-offend rates for those who found a job quickly.
- The rate of re-offending went down notably from 66 percent to 35 percent if they earned a higher salary (less than \$12,500 versus \$35,000 during the first six months after release).
- How long a job was kept mattered, with those holding a job for at least a year having a lower likelihood of returning to prison, regardless of how long it took to get hired.

(Continued on Page 4)

## Mat-Su Reentry Events:

- **Mat-Su Reentry Coalition Steering Team Meeting**  
Tuesday, March 4, 2025  
9:00 to 10:30 AM

The Mat-Su Reentry Coalition has a virtual Steering Team Meeting on the first Tuesday of each month. All Welcome to attend.

- **Virtual Mat-Su Reentry Services Forum**  
Wed, February 19, 2025  
10:00 to 11:00 AM

The Mat-Su Reentry Coalition and Reentry Case Management Program invites you to join us in a virtual Reentry Services Forum. Service providers, PO’s, Case Managers, and anyone interested

**For questions, to sign up, or for zoom links to the above events please contact Barbara Mongar at: [barbara.mongar@valleycharities.org](mailto:barbara.mongar@valleycharities.org)**

## Knik Tribe Events:

- **Knik Tribe Family Culture Nights** — Bi-Weekly, Wednesday, 5:30 - 7:30 PM; Location: 758 Shoreline Dr. Wasilla, AK; Open to All [Compact@KnikTribe.org](mailto:Compact@KnikTribe.org) 907-373-7991
- **Talking Circle**—Tuesday, at 6:30 and Wednesday at 5:30; Same location above; **Contact Ralph Lewis at 907-841-9773**
- **Youth Wellbriety Circle** — Fridays, from 1 to 3PM; Location: MyHouse, Wasilla

## Second Chance at Success (Continued from Page 3)

- The most common first occupations after release from prison, by number employed, were construction laborers, laborers and hand movers, food prep and servers, dishwashers, cashiers, and meat, poultry, and fish cutters and trimmers. Few formerly incarcerated individuals find high-paying, high-skill jobs upon release (only 50 out of 4,500 reached \$65,000 annually by 2015).

Lee acknowledged that other factors also play a role in recidivism, including substance abuse, mental health, poverty, extent of criminal history, demographics, and childhood abuse or neglect.

### Education in Alaska's Prisons

DOC administers a unified correctional system that includes pre-trial detention and secure facilities for sentenced state offenders. To promote rehabilitation and successful reintegration upon release, ADOC offers a variety of rehabilitative programs within each facility. These programs may encompass educational services like Adult Basic Education or General Education Diploma classes, alongside vocational training opportunities.

Depending on the correctional facility, vocational programs could equip inmates with skills to earn certifications such as Alaska Food Service Worker Card, Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response, or first aid/CPR. Additionally, some programs might offer training in practical trades like motor vehicle repair, commercial driving, HVAC, or welding. This diverse range of programs aims to improve inmates' employability.

A partnership between the lieutenant governor's office, ADOC, and the Western State Regional Council of Carpenters has launched a pilot pre-apprenticeship carpentry program for incarcerated Alaskans in certain facilities. The program's curriculum is focused on providing participants with the skills and knowledge necessary to pursue a carpentry career upon release. Successful completion may lead to union membership and industry certification.

Alaska has no federal prisons, so those awaiting trial or sentencing are held in state facilities, while sentenced prisoners are typically transferred to Federal Correctional Institution Sheridan in Oregon.

### How to Become a "Fair Chance" Employer

The US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) enforces Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, barring job discrimination based on race, color, religion, national origin, or sex. EEOC considers a policy discriminatory if it disproportionately impacts protected groups based on criminal history, unless the employer can justify it as job-related and necessary. EEOC enforcement guidance offers the following best practices for fair chance hiring:

- Avoid upfront inquiries: Remove the checkbox asking about criminal records from initial applications.
- Transparency: Include a statement clarifying that criminal records alone won't disqualify applicants.
- Train your team: Equip HR staff and hiring managers with skills to make fair decisions regarding criminal history.
- Informed consent: Obtain a signed release for background checks, covering criminal records, past employment, and education.
- Accurate information: Use reliable background check providers to ensure correct data.
- Consistent application: Conduct background checks for all candidates at the same stage, ideally after the interview and not up front, to avoid potential bias.

### What is Next?

Justice is complicated. It is layered with issues ranging from racial disparities, the connection between incarceration and health, and the role of substance abuse and its connection to crime.

DOC Director of Health and Rehabilitation Services Travis Welch sums it up well. He states, "Our goal within corrections is for those in our custody to leave better than they came in. That can happen through a holistic approach of addressing trauma, physical health, education, and vocational training. Our hope is this leads to meaningful and gainful employment which provides a livable wage."

Companies that support providing employment to individuals with a criminal record often cite the benefits for everyone: safer neighborhoods, stronger families, and a fairer shot at success for everyone, regardless of one's past. But none of this can happen without businesses being open to hiring people and seeking out a wider talent pool: people who are eager to prove themselves and become valuable employees, people who are more than their worst mistake. Giving them a chance isn't just the right thing to do, it can be good business.

The Mat-Su Reentry Coalition is a collaboration of individuals, community stakeholders, public and not-for-profit agencies, faith-based and business partners who are united and committed to reducing recidivism among returning citizens to the Mat-Su community.

### Our Mission

To promote public safety by identifying and implementing strategies that increase former prisoners' wellbeing within the community and reduce the likelihood of their return to prison through recidivating.

We will accomplish this by:

- Improved communication and collaboration between Alaska Department of Corrections (DOC) and the community.
- Building community partnerships to strengthen local services.
- Identifying barriers for those being released from incarceration and taking an active role in addressing those concerns.
- Promoting community educational and training opportunities for those releasing regarding resources.
- Work in conjunction with Alaska DOC to inform and promote reentry efforts in Alaska.

**Note:** For more information on the Mat-Su Reentry Coalition contact [Barbara.mongar@valleycharities.org](mailto:Barbara.mongar@valleycharities.org) or go to our Webpage at [Mat-Su Valley Reentry Program | Valley Charities Inc](http://Mat-Su Valley Reentry Program | Valley Charities Inc)

By: **Amanda Carlson**, Mat-Su Job Center Manager

Mat-Su Job Center staff are available weekdays 8am-5pm for both job seeker and business services, our current labor market is abundant with opportunities. Whether you have barriers to employment, are new to the labor market, or have a job but would like a better one, come in and meet our staff to learn about our services and the many opportunities available. We are located at 877 W. Commercial Drive in Wasilla or call us at (907) 352-2500. We want to partner with you for the success of our fellow Alaskans!

The Mat-Su Employer Expo/Job Fair is March 26<sup>th</sup> at the Menard Center in Wasilla from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., we have over 100 employers, partners and vendors attending this annual event. Please help us get the word out to the public by sharing the flyer to your websites/social media pages, or in your business, send out to your customers, friends and family and encourage them to attend. This is a great event for networking, to learn about community resources, who's hiring, and what training and apprenticeship opportunities are available.

Individuals who experience barriers to employment receive priority for funding under the Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA) Adult & Dislocated Worker program, this funding is administered by our Career Support & Training staff and can be used for workforce preparation, career services, training services and job placement assistance needed to increase occupational skill attainment, obtain industry recognized credentials, and secure a good job that provides earnings that lead to self-sufficiency. Refer customers our way or contact us to learn more.



For the most up to date information on recruitments, job fairs, virtual job readiness workshops and job training opportunities please visit Alaska's Job Center Network at <http://www.jobs.alaska.gov/> and choose from options on the right side of the main menu.

**February Trends:** Nonresident worker counts rise across industries, especially construction, as demand increases.  
**Also inside:** Hoonah carves its own niche in Southeast

### Monthly Highlight of Resources in the Mat-Su

- **Nine Star Education & Employment Services: Mat-Su Adult Education Program** - This program provides services for adults from 16 to 116 that include diploma completion, career assistance, and English as a second language.  
**Phone:** (907) 373-7833; **Address:** Westside Center, 899 W. Commercial Dr., Wasilla, AK 99654  
**Website:** [Mat-Su Adult Education - Nine Star Education & Employment Services](#)
- **Vocational Rehabilitation Division, Alaska Department of Labor:** They assist individuals with physical, intellectual or mental conditions prepare for, get and keep good jobs.  
**Phone:** (907) 352-2545; **Address:** 913 Commercial Dr. Wasilla, AK 99654  
**Website:** [Vocational Rehabilitation](#)