# Recommendations to Enhance D.C.'s Reentry Workforce Ecosystem

On May 12, 2026, the Second Chance Hiring Alliance (SCHA) convened employers, workforce development representatives, government agency representatives, and justice impacted individuals for a series of facilitated small-group discussions on gaps in Washington D.C.'s reentry workforce landscape. The purpose of the convening, titled "From Workforce Training to Employment: Improving Pathways for Reentry," was to bring all the players in the 'workforce reentry ecosystem' in D.C.together to build relationships, share best practices, and identify recommendations for how SCHA could provide support in making the ecosystem more streamlined and collaborative. This brief outlines the top-line takeaways from the events, with a focus on next steps the Second Chance Hiring Alliance could take to help improve the effectiveness of the reentry workforce ecosystem in finding good jobs for justice-impacted Washingtonians.

## ***Improved Communication and Coordination Between Workforce Development Programs and Employers***

Workforce development and job training programs are most effective when there is two-way communication between them and employers. The programs need to know about open positions, desired skills, or necessary certifications. The employers need to know what restrictions and limitations programs are operating under.

To facilitate clear communication and collaboration, SCHA could:

- Organize and convene advisory groups in different sectors (e.g., banking, construction, hospitality, health care, logistics, etc.) where employers review curriculum, discuss desired certifications and soft skills, and provide feedback on graduate preparedness. These advisory groups would be composed of employers and workforce development providers – putting key players in conversation with each other. Such advisory meetings could occur once or twice a year to ensure that workforce needs are consistently being tracked and updated. Following each meeting, SCHA could produce and distribute a short workforce needs brief that participating workforce development providers may use when updating curricula.

- Survey employers about the skills, certifications, and workplace competencies they value most, then share these findings with workforce development providers to help ensure technical and soft skill training reflects actual employer demand. These efforts would help transform employer relationships from occasional hiring partnerships into ongoing collaborations that create clearer pathways from training to employment.

## ***Employer Education***

Rather than simply being reluctant to hire justice-impacted jobseekers, participants expressed that they felt confused or overwhelmed by the prospect of it. Employers also expressed unfamiliarity with the technical process of second chance hiring.

SCHA could respond by:

- Expanding employer coaching and technical assistance opportunities focused on the specifics of hiring justice-impacted jobseekers, including guidance on interpreting criminal records, conducting individualized assessments, and distinguishing offenses that are relevant to a particular position from those that are not.

- Develop webinars and trainings based on our existing employer toolkit, The Workforce Solution: D.C. Employer's FAQ for Second Chance Hiring. This resource includes legal protections, financial incentives, and community support for employers. These trainings could expand upon details about certain resources, like the Federal Bonding Program, which several participants identified as a valuable resource for reducing employers' feelings of risk when hiring a justice-impacted employee.

- Organize workshops and one-on one consultations led by experienced second-chance employers, government agency officials, and workforce development experts. By increasing awareness of these resources and helping employers navigate the hiring process, SCHA can reduce uncertainty while expanding employment opportunities for justice-impacted individuals.

## ***Strategic Data Sharing***

Participants at the convening almost universally agreed that a lack of data and clear information about job placement rates, certifications received, retention, employer policies, etc. hinders their ability to fund, design, and coordinate successful job training programs or determine which of those programs were most effective. Unfortunately, though, it was difficult for participants to identify how best to obtain and share the data needed.

A couple of preliminary next steps for SCHA to take include:

- Advocating for the D.C. Council, Mayor's Office of Returning Citizen Affairs (MORCA), and the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC) to establish a shared workforce data framework across partner organizations. Though this is easier said than done, there are attempts and successes nationwide that SCHA could research and reference.

- Encourage workforce development providers and participating employers to report common outcome measures — such as job placement rates, six- and twelve-month retention, industries entered, and employer participation.

## ***Supporting Entrepreneurship***

Outside of these traditional employment pathways and workforce development programming, entrepreneurship was also identified as a viable and legitimate career pathway for justice-impacted individuals seeking greater autonomy and long-term economic stability. Participants noted that justice-impacted entrepreneurs are uniquely positioned to create opportunities for others with similar lived experiences, so expanding entrepreneurship support has the potential to generate broader economic opportunities throughout the reentry community, not just for individual business owners. While entrepreneurship is not one of the focus areas of the SCHA, other resources for new and emerging entrepreneurs exist throughout the District.

SCHA could:

- Explore opportunities to support entrepreneurship by connecting justice-impacted entrepreneurs with mentorship networks and funding resources.

- Build relationships with organizations and programs providing support to entrepreneurs to then connect them with SCHA where they could receive some of the training and resources mentioned above.

## ***Considerations for the Future***

SCHA's "From Workforce Training to Employment: Improving Pathways for Reentry" convening reinforced that second-chance hiring is not the responsibility of any single organization or sector. It is a shared effort that requires employers, workforce development providers, government agencies, and community organizations to align their expertise and resources around a common goal. The recommendations outlined in this report provide practical steps that SCHA can advance through its partnerships and convening role. By continuing to foster collaboration across the District's reentry ecosystem, SCHA can help ensure workforce development programs are effective, employers strengthen community connections, and justice-impacted individuals find meaningful employment.