

# Narrowing The Gap



## Economic Inequality

### Positive Relationship Between Employment And Reduction Of Crime

Over three quarters (76%) of those who were formerly incarcerated reported that finding a job was “very difficult or nearly impossible” according to a [2015 Ella Baker Center for Human Rights survey](#). Further more than two-thirds (67%) were still unemployed or underemployed five years post-release.

Criminal justice experts agree expanding employment opportunities to the justice-involved is critical to reducing the incarcerated population. [Ban The Box](#), which 24 states and over 100 cities and counties have adopted, is viewed as a step in the right direction. The policy requires employers to consider a job candidate’s qualifications before inquiring about his/her criminal history. [Large corporations](#) like Starbucks, Facebook, American Airlines, and Coca-Cola have been supportive of Ban The Box. By serving as models, these companies may convince others to also re-examine recruiting and hiring practices for the justice-involved.

### Adults On Probation In NYC Are Ten Times More Likely To Be Unemployed Than General Population

In New York City (NYC) the Equality Indicators found the majority of adults on probation were unemployed (60.8%). The unemployment rate among probationers was almost 10 times the unemployment rate of the general population (6.5%).

The NYC Department of Probation sponsors a number of programs for probationers to assist with employment including the [Young Adult Literacy Program \(YALP\)](#), [Justice Plus](#) (work readiness), and [Next STEPS](#) (cognitive behavioral therapy). But discrimination remains an obstacle to justice-involved individuals securing jobs.

In 2015 Mayor de Blasio signed [The Fair Chance Act](#), buttressing efforts to prevent employment discrimination against the justice-involved in NYC. The legislation aims to reduce barriers to stable employment by barring employers from asking questions about the criminal records of their applicants until after conditional job offers have been made.

## Educational Inequality

### Inmates Attending Vocational Training 43% Lower Odds Of Returning To Prison After Release

In 2013 [RAND](#) conducted the largest study to date of the relationship between prison education and recidivism. They found inmates who attended academic or vocational training had 43% lower odds of returning to prison.

However, the data on availability of educational and vocational programs in correctional facilities is limited. The most recent nationwide data are from a 2003 special report by [BJS](#). According to these data, over half of state prison inmates (52%) and Federal inmates (57%) participated in educational programming during their most recent admission. In contrast, just 14% of jail inmates and 23% of probationers participated in educational programming. This report also provided information on the availability of vocational training. This programming was offered by over half (56%) of state prisons, 94% of Federal prisons, and 44% of private prisons, but just 7% of local jails, according to the most recent estimates.

The effectiveness of vocational training is impacted by a number of factors. A [2012 report](#) by the Department of Education stressed that programs need to be consistent with the opportunities actually available in the local community in order to help former inmates secure employment.

### Vast Majority Of Sentenced Jail Inmates Do Not Attend Vocational Training

Vocational training may be particularly important for inmates, given that people with a criminal record are 2 times as likely not to have a high school diploma (15.6%) as those without a criminal record (7.5%). In NYC, the average daily jail population in 2016 was 9,790 (Mayor’s Management Report), yet there were only 226 inmates in vocational skills training programs on average.

The jail population includes those who may be in for limited periods of time; more than three quarters are pre-trial detainees. Yet even if we assume all of the jail inmates attending vocational training are sentenced, the vast majority of even the sentenced population does not attend vocational training (88.9%).

Young people (aged 19-24) who become justice-involved are tracked by the NYC Department of Education (DOE). In NYC’s largest jail complex, Riker’s Island, [DOE found 96% of eligible inmates aged 19-24 did not attend school or receive vocational training while in custody](#). Because of this, DOE implemented a targeted program for reaching them, the [Educational Expansion Program on Rikers Island](#). The program involved a number of activities combined with monetary incentives and an additional 380 seats. As a result of the program, enrollment increased to 609 or 31% of the 19 to 24 year-old population.

## Narrowing The Gap, Volume 13, November 2016

In this issue of *Narrowing The Gap*, we focus on one of the groups adversely affected by inequality: **Individuals Currently In Jail Or On Probation**. Other issues will describe inequalities faced by children, immigrants, individuals living in poverty, individuals with less than a high school diploma, individuals with a physical or intellectual disability, lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer, racial and ethnic minorities, religious minorities, seniors, single parents, and women.

## Justice Inequality

### Re-Enfranchisement Laws Vary Widely State To State Creating Disparate Opportunities For Voting

The [American Civil Liberties Union \(ACLU\)](#) provides a state-by-state roundup of re-enfranchisement laws. By the ACLU's estimates, 5.85 million Americans with felony (or in several states misdemeanor) convictions are prohibited from voting. Vermont and Maine are the only two states in which prisoners, parolees, and probationers are permitted to vote.

While the vast majority of states (48) prohibit voting by people while they are in prison, specific rules vary from state to state and are often confusing and misapplied. [Many states](#) do in fact allow people with felony convictions to vote after they have completed their sentence. The most restrictive voter disenfranchisement laws occur in Iowa, Kentucky, and Florida where all people with a felony conviction are permanently disenfranchised. New York is one of four states that prohibit only those in prison and on parole from voting.

The [Institute for Research on Poverty](#) notes the disconnect between policy and public sentiment when it comes to voting rights; in contrast to the more drastic of these laws, the majority of Americans believe former felons should be allowed to vote.

### Confusion About Eligibility To Vote In New York Uncovered By The Brennan Center

Although those on probation are allowed to vote in New York State, there continues to be widespread confusion about their eligibility. In 2006, a Brennan Center survey identified problems with New York's local board of elections in their understanding of voting eligibility. Over a third of them thought that New Yorkers on probation were not eligible to vote, or did not know whether they were eligible.

Voting is one crucial way the justice-involved can feel re-engaged with the society they live in. It is an important way of reintegrating the justice-involved within the community. In July a [bill](#) restoring the right to vote for the more than 40,000 New Yorkers who are currently on parole and prohibited from voting was introduced in the New York Assembly according to [The Brennan Center](#). While it did not go to a full vote, it passed two committees, showing growing support within the legislature.

Denying the justice-involved the right to vote can have a negative impact on public safety. As a result, organizations like The Brennan Center are actively working to change voting ineligibility for New Yorkers.

## Housing Inequality

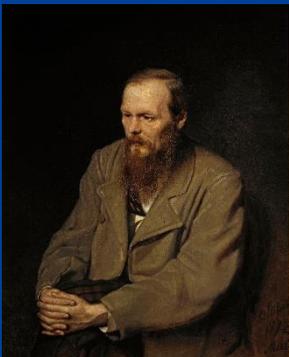
### National Efforts To Increase Availability Of Stable And Affordable Housing For Justice-Involved

The [National Low Income Housing Coalition \(NLIHC\)](#) advocates for affordable housing on behalf of the justice-involved. NLIHC notes how these individuals often re-enter low-income communities where affordable housing is scarce upon release. Stable housing can help offset the risks these individuals face of returning to crime or becoming homeless. But public housing authorities (PHAs) and owners of federally-assisted housing are able to screen out justice-involved applicants or prevent them from living with their families in these units.

In April 2016 California Congresswoman [Maxine Waters](#) introduced The Fair Chance At Housing Act which mandates that PHAs or owners review "the totality of circumstances" around an applicant's criminal background. This could include disability-related offenses.

"The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons."

-Fyodor Dostoyevsky



### New York Helps Justice-Involved Young People Remain Or Move Back Into Public Housing

Justice-involved young people (up to age 24) are especially vulnerable to finding and keeping stable housing when they re-enter communities for two reasons: lack of affordable housing and ineligibility for public housing because of their criminal record.

Two new programs aim to improve access to housing for the young who are justice-involved: the [Juvenile Reentry Assistance Program \(JRAP\)](#) and the [Family Re-Entry Pilot Program \(FREPP\)](#).

Through JRAP, the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) awarded \$300,000 to New York City, Syracuse, and Albany to work on reducing barriers to housing and jobs for justice-involved youth. Part of this strategy involves giving these youth greater access to legal services that seal records or reinstate driver's licenses.

The [FREPP program](#) is a NYC-specific program, run by the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), that seeks to keep families that include a justice-involved individual together. Participants in the program are given permission to live with family members in public housing for two years. Eligible participants must be at least 16 years old, have relatives that live in a NYCHA building, have been released from a correctional facility in the last three years, and be willing to participate in a case management program. [NYCHA](#) views the program as an extension of the Obama administration's commitment to "second chances" for people that have paid their debt to society.

The Equality Indicators is a project of the [Institute for State and Local Governance \(ISLG\)](#) of the City University of New York.

The project measures progress towards greater equality across six themes related to **Economy**, **Education**, **Health**, **Housing**, **Justice**, and **Services** using 96 indicators. Each indicator is scored from 1 to 100, where 1 represents the most inequality and 100 the least inequality. For more information please visit our website at [equalityindicators.org](http://equalityindicators.org) and follow us on twitter [@equalityISLG](https://twitter.com/equalityISLG)