

Income-Supported Reentry

Immediate Income as a Bridge to Work, Stability, and Public Safety

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Policy focus:

Income-Supported Reentry (cash assistance and short-term income supports for people returning from incarceration)

Why it matters now:

Each year, more than 600,000 people return home from incarceration, often with little or no income at the moment they are expected to secure housing, food, transportation, and employment. Delays in income—whether from work, benefits, or other supports—create instability during the most fragile period of reentry, increasing the risk of homelessness, unemployment, and recidivism.

Who is impacted:

Justice-impacted individuals returning to communities nationwide, particularly those facing barriers to employment, housing discrimination, benefit delays, and debt accrued during incarceration.

CEO's position:

Income-supported reentry is a cost-effective, evidence-based public safety and workforce strategy. Short-term cash assistance—paired with employment services—provides immediate stability, accelerates job placement, and reduces costly justice system involvement.

BACKGROUND

For decades, reentry policy has assumed that employment alone can quickly stabilize people returning from incarceration. In practice, this assumption ignores the realities of reentry: individuals often leave prison with little money, delayed access to benefits, limited transportation, and immediate financial obligations.

Traditional reentry funding has prioritized supervision and compliance over stabilization. Yet research and program experience demonstrate **that economic insecurity—especially in the first weeks and months after release—is a primary driver of reentry failure.**

CEO's expansion strategy underscores the scale of this gap. Despite proven models, most returning individuals still lack access to income-supported reentry employment at scale.

Income supports are not a replacement for work—they are a **bridge to work.**



THE CHALLENGE

A Zero-Income Gap at the Moment of Highest Risk

People returning from incarceration face:

- Immediate expenses for food, housing, transportation, clothing, and identification
- Delays in wages from new jobs or transitional employment
- Delays or gaps in SNAP, Medicaid, and other benefits
- Ongoing supervision costs, fines, and fees

Without income during this transition, individuals are forced into crisis-driven decisions that undermine employment, family stability, and public safety.

This gap is not a failure of individuals—it is a failure of systems.

WHY INCOME-SUPPORTED REENTRY IS ESSENTIAL

Economic Stability Drives Public Safety and Workforce Outcomes

Evidence from CEO and peer programs shows that when people have access to short-term cash assistance during reentry:

- They are better able to secure and retain employment
- They remain engaged in workforce and training programs longer
- They use funds for basic needs such as food, rent, transportation, and job preparation
- They experience fewer justice system violations and disruptions

Income support enables people to [participate fully in employment pathways](#), rather than cycling through instability that undermines both individual success and taxpayer investment.

THE SOLUTIONS

1. Establish Income-Supported Reentry as Core Infrastructure

Federal, state, and local governments should treat short-term cash assistance as a foundational reentry support—on par with employment services, housing navigation, and healthcare access.

Key elements include:

- Immediate, time-limited cash support upon release
- Alignment with employment and training programs
- Minimal administrative barriers
- Flexibility to meet individual needs



2. Integrate Cash Assistance with Employment Pathways

Income supports are most effective when paired with:





- Paid transitional jobs and subsidized employment
- Career coaching and credential pathways
- Retention support after job placement

This integration ensures cash assistance accelerates—not replaces—connection to work.

3. Scale Proven Models Through Public Funding

CEO’s experience scaling reentry employment and cash assistance demonstrates that public investment can deliver strong returns when grounded in evidence and implementation expertise.

BY THE NUMBERS

 <p>600,000+ people return from prison each year</p>	 <p>60% of formerly incarcerated individuals struggle with unemployment in the first year</p>	 <p>CEO’s model generates up to \$3.85 in public benefit for every \$1 invested</p>	 <p>Income-supported reentry reduces costly justice system involvement and strengthens local economies</p>
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CONCLUSION

Reentry success is not achieved by supervision alone—it requires stability.

Income-supported reentry is a **public safety strategy**, a **workforce strategy**, and a **smart use of taxpayer dollars**. By providing immediate economic stability, policymakers can reduce recidivism, accelerate employment, and build safer, stronger communities.

As CEO works to scale reentry employment nationwide, income support must be recognized as essential infrastructure—not an optional add-on.

The cost of inaction is continued instability, reincarceration, and missed economic potential. The solution is clear: invest once, stabilize early, and unlock long-term success.

