

DRIVING PROGRESS: WHY TWICE IS VITAL FOR JUSTICE-IMPACTED WORKERS

REMOVING BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT IN HIGH-DEMAND PROFESSIONS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC) cards are required by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for employees entering secure areas of port facilities, such as certain cargo terminals, commercial ships, and warehouses. TWIC cards are critical for people with a Commercial Driver’s License (CDL), which justice-impacted individuals often pursue to access lucrative careers.

However, obtaining a TWIC card as a formerly incarcerated person presents a key barrier. Justice-impacted people receive a preliminary determination of ineligibility for one year after reentry, regardless of their offense. This means their application is automatically flagged and denied, even if they would meet the qualifications for approval otherwise.

While applicants may appeal this decision – and the majority of appeals are approved – this process is opaque and complicated. This not only impacts justice-involved individuals, but compounds national labor shortages in high-demand professions.

The Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) supports the bipartisan TWIC Efficiency (TWICE) Act (H.R.5109) as a strong first step to reducing this barrier to employment. The Act clarifies justice-involved individuals’ access to TWIC, assists them through the appeal process, and allows those in the justice system to apply for the credential before their release, thereby empowering equitable access to employment.

BACKGROUND

TWIC is a federal homeland-security program created in the aftermath of 9/11 that provides a personalized card to workers who require unescorted access to secure areas of port facilities. However, the application process for these mandatory credentials creates a significant roadblock for justice-impacted individuals seeking employment in maritime facilities in cities like Philadelphia, New York, New Orleans, Houston, and San Diego.

While TWIC cards contribute to necessary national safety measures, broadly denying the credential to all individuals with criminal histories deters many qualified jobseekers from

pursuing employment that requires a TWIC card and creates unnecessary administrative work for TSA who could otherwise be focused on identifying applicants with the few convictions that are actually ineligible for a TWIC card.

Although justice-impacted individuals are almost always eligible to apply for a card, they face several barriers that limit their ability to receive one, eliminating a key opportunity for employment in several high-demand sectors.

THE CHALLENGE

The TSA's TWIC application requires original documents that are difficult to access for the majority of justice-impacted people such as a passport or birth certificate, a certificate of completion of parole or probation, and a \$125 application fee. People leaving incarceration often do not have the funds to afford the application fee in addition to the various fines and fees associated with leaving prison.

they will still receive a preliminary rejection due to their background and must appeal or request a waiver from the federal program. This redress process is difficult and intimidating for many, requiring additional documents and lasting multiple months. Data collected from TSA shows that 62% of TWIC card applicants do not respond to redress notifications, even though the majority of those redress cases are approved by TSA.

Assuming someone who has been incarcerated meets all the requirements to obtain a TWIC card,

These delays increase instability and the risk of reincarceration despite strong motivation to work.

JOEL'S STORY

The TWIC process is a frustrating barrier for both justice-involved individuals and prospective employees. Updated guidelines can ensure TWIC preserve our safety without unnecessarily restricting opportunities for employment.

After saving up his money to pay the \$125 application fee, Joel applied for a TWIC card. He was denied and started the appeal process which caused several challenges for Joel. He had to find three letters of support and address discrepancies that surfaced in his background check. Ultimately, Joel was unable to complete all of the appeal requirements within the 60-day timeframe and he could not afford another \$125 to start a new application.

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WE NEED TO MAKE SURE PEOPLE HAVE KNOWLEDGE OF THE SYSTEM AND REQUIREMENTS – ESPECIALLY THE APPEAL PROCESS – IF WE WANT PEOPLE TO BE SUCCESSFUL AND CONNECTED TO THE WORKFORCE.”

Joel, New Orleans, LA

WHY BARRIER REMOVAL IS ESSENTIAL TO REENTRY

Employment is one of the strongest predictors of successful reentry. When formerly incarcerated people work:



recidivism rates
decline by 22%¹



incarceration for new crime
decreases by 25%²



they have longer tenures &
lower turnover rates
than other populations³

Removing these barriers does not threaten security. It allows workforce systems to function as intended.

BY THE NUMBERS



600,000+

people return home from incarceration each year.⁴



75%

of justice-involved individuals remain unemployed for one year upon release.⁵



On average, a driver with a CDL makes **\$55k annually**, unlocking a lucrative career for justice-involved individuals.⁶



37%

of businesses in supply chain and logistics, including U.S. ports, report staffing shortages.⁷



2.2 million

TWIC cards are currently active, and 10k new cards are issued each week.⁸

THE SOLUTION

The TWIC Efficiency (TWICE) ACT | H.R.5109

The TWICE Act aims to take an important first step in addressing these barriers by instructing the TSA to better support individuals at the federal, state, and local level in:

- Pre-applying and preparing applications for the TWIC credential before release
- Navigating the appeal process of preliminary determinations after release

This bill was introduced with bipartisan original co-sponsors: Representatives Troy A. Carter, Sr. (D-LA) and Clay Higgins (R-LA).

CONCLUSION



The barriers preventing justice-involved individuals from finding employment in TWIC-related sectors impact entire communities. Ultimately, this stops motivated, qualified employees from filling critical jobs.

The cost of inaction is continued instability, reincarceration, and missed economic potential. The TWICE Act represents a commonsense reform that would allow individuals motivated to work to secure employment and economic independence. Policymakers should act now to remove unnecessary limitations to employment and ensure long-term success – for both employees and employers – by passing the TWICE Act.