

FACES & VOICES OF RECOVERY

Criminal Justice Recovery Advocacy How Recovery Advocates Can Continue to Advocate for Change

This document is a companion to Faces & Voices Policy Position Paper on Criminal Justice Recovery Advocacy. It describes ways that recovery community organizations and recovery advocates can partner with allies at the local, state and federal levels to advocate for criminal justice policy reform.

At the **local level** (town, city or county) advocates could focus on:

- Organizing and mobilizing the recovery community to advocate for people in recovery who have been formerly incarcerated;
- Holding town hall meetings, rallies, and summits as a means for raising public awareness and directing advocacy efforts;
 - [Community Listening Forum Toolkit](#)
- Linking individuals who are incarcerated to peer recovery coaches to help them transition to community-based recovery supports;
- Developing recovery support systems and organizations with the aim of developing recovery-oriented systems of care;
- Enrolling individuals who are incarcerated in Medicaid so that they will be eligible for services and support upon release;
- Advocating with local housing authorities to expand housing opportunities for individuals with criminal convictions while still protecting public safety by prohibiting consideration of arrests that never led to conviction and assessing all applicants individually on their merits;
- Ensuring recovery community organizations are represented within Accountable Care Organizations;
- Advocating for “Ban the Box” legislation that would eliminate questions about past convictions on initial employment applications.
 - National Employment Law Center Resource Guide: [Ban the Box Campaign](#)

At the **state level** advocates could focus on:

- Advocating for policies that support recovery-oriented communities;
- Eliminating state policy barriers that discriminate against people with criminal justice histories seeking to sustain their recovery;
 - Advocating for legislation to prohibit any inquiries about, consideration, and use of information about arrests by employers, housing authorities and other non-law enforcement agencies that did not lead to conviction.
 - Advocating for legislation that prohibits across-the-board employment bans based on conviction records and requires employers as well as agencies that conduct criminal history background checks to assess job applicants individually on their merits.
 - [Massachusetts Organization for Addiction Recovery \(C.O.R.I. Reform\)](#)
 - Advocating for legislation approving and disseminating nasal naloxone and making it available to those supporting returning incarcerated individuals with a history of opioid dependence because the risk for overdose death is 12 times the norm for re-entering individuals.
 - [Long Island Recovery Advocates](#)
 - [McShin Foundation, VA](#)
 - [People Advocating Recovery, KY](#)
 - Advocating for “Ban the Box” legislation that would eliminate questions about past convictions on initial employment applications.
 - [RI-CARES](#)
 - [DC Recovery Community Alliance](#)
 - Advocating for legislation to create certificates of rehabilitation that lift automatic bans to employment, occupational licenses and public housing.
 - [NCADD-New Jersey](#)
 - [CCAR, CT](#)
 - Advocating for legislation that automatically seals arrests that never led to convictions and seals old and minor convictions after a reasonable period of time.
 - Oppose proposals to require drug testing for public benefits.
 - [Georgia Council on Substance Abuse](#)
 - Support state efforts to restore voting rights of the convicted who have repaid their debt to society.
 - [People Advocating Recovery, KY](#)
 - [McShin Foundation, VA](#)
 - Advocate for inclusion of MH/SUD, including recovery supports in a state’s benchmark benefit plan.
 - Friends of Recovery VT
 - [Georgia Council on Substance Abuse](#)
 - [Massachusetts Organization for Addiction Recovery](#)
 - [Ohio Citizen Advocates](#)
 - [People Advocating Recovery, KY](#)
 - [PRO-ACT, PA](#)

- [Recover Wyoming](#)
- [SAARA Virginia](#)
- [USARA, Utah](#)

States are moving to change these discriminatory laws. In 2012 in Ohio, advocates were successful in enacting a law to allow for expungement of felony and misdemeanor convictions and soon, people will be eligible for Certificates of Rehabilitation. Stories like the one below were important in moving legislators to enact these changes.

Alicia Nash had finished her paralegal degree at Cincinnati State Community College and was ready to pursue a career in the legal field. Although she could be described as intelligent, responsible and conscientious, she found that potential employers labeled her with just one word: criminal. She had two convictions for theft and obstruction of official business that were both committed while she was addicted to drugs. She took her involvement with the court as a wakeup call and committed fully to her rehabilitation, completing multiple drug rehab and support programs. When Alicia decided to enroll in school, however, she found that although she had changed, her criminal record placed a stigma on her that was going to make finding productive work in her chosen field extremely difficult.

Alicia applied to have her record sealed, which would clear her record on most background checks. At her court date, she was disappointed when she was told she was not eligible because she had multiple convictions. In Ohio, generally only “first offenders,” with just one conviction, are eligible have their criminal record sealed. Alicia then turned to the Second Chance Community Legal Clinic to see if there was any way to overcome her criminal record. Alicia’s case fit into a narrow exception to the “first offender” rule, which allows two related convictions committed within three months to be sealed. Now that Alicia has had her record sealed, she can fully utilize her paralegal degree to improve her own life as well as to be a productive member of the community.

Bending Toward Justice, Ohio Justice & Policy Center 2011 Annual Report

At the **federal level** advocates could focus on:

- Eliminating federal administrative and legislative barriers to housing, jobs and other public benefits for people with criminal justice histories;
- Advocating for ongoing funding for the Second Chance Act;
- Supporting funding for Drug Courts;
- Advocating for full implementation of the Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act and providing assistance to individuals in filing appeals of denied claims;
 - [Parity Implementation Coalition](#)
- Inclusion of the full continuum of substance use and mental health services in the Essential health benefits, including community-based recovery supports in implementing the Affordable Care Act; and

- [Coalition for Whole Health](#)
- Initiating or supporting efforts to limit or eliminate the federal lifetime ban on anyone convicted of a drug-related felony from receiving federally funded food stamps and cash assistance (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, or TANF).

Advocacy Resources

Recovery community organizations around the country have initiated advocacy campaigns and partnered with allied organizations to advocate for criminal justice policy reform. Here are links to some of those organizations.

- The Legal Action Center's (LAC) [ADVOCACY TOOLKITS TO COMBAT LEGAL BARRIERS FACING INDIVIDUALS WITH CRIMINAL RECORDS](#) covers 12 critically important policy, funding and legal issues facing people with criminal justice histories. LAC's [National Hire Network](#) is a national clearinghouse for information and an advocate for policy change.
- [The National Reentry Resource Center](#) provides education, training, and technical assistance to advance reentry.
- [State Reforms Promoting Employment of People with Criminal Records: 2010-2011 Legislative Round-Up](#)

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