



Washington State  
DEPARTMENT OF  
ENTERPRISE SERVICES



SEPTEMBER 2025

## **Supporting successful reentry:**

Plan for supervisor  
training on considering  
criminal history in the  
hiring process

SEPTEMBER 2024 — AUGUST 2025

Equity & Employee Development

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# Report to the Legislature

# Agency Overview

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The Department of Enterprise Services (DES) provides centralized services to state government agencies; to other public entities such as cities, counties and tribes; and to Washington residents.

DES' mission is to strengthen the business of government.

We do this by creating overall operating efficiencies so our state's government entities can focus on their core missions. Our buying power, economies of scale and years of experience help government get the best value for the products and services they need to support their missions.

## Key Services

- Capitol Campus stewardship
- Construction & public works
- Contracts & procurement
- Employee Assistance Program
- Energy efficiency
- Engineering & architectural services
- Facilities management
- Fleet management & EVs
- Parking management
- Print & mail services
- Property management
- Real estate services
- Risk management
- Small agency support
- Surplus property
- Training & workforce development



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# Contents

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Executive summary .....	1
Key initiatives.....	1
Expected impact.....	1
Introduction .....	2
Statutory directive .....	2
Background .....	2
Scope .....	2
Methodology.....	3
Results.....	3
Initiatives .....	3
Implementation timeline .....	4
Discussion .....	5
Recommendations .....	6
Immediate actions (July 2025-January 2026) .....	6
Medium-term development (6-18 months) .....	6
Proposed: Long-term systemic changes (18+ months).....	7
Conclusions.....	7
Acknowledgements .....	8
References .....	8
Glossary.....	8

# Executive summary

In September 2024, former Governor Inslee released [Executive Order 24-03](#), which focuses on building safe and strong communities by having programs, processes, and trainings that support previously incarcerated people in successfully reentering the community.

As part of this effort, the Department of Enterprise Services (DES) must work with the Office of Financial Management (OFM) to update supervisor training materials so state supervisors understand how to fairly consider criminal history during the hiring process. DES has developed an implementation plan to reach this goal by 2030.

DES' comprehensive implementation plan will support state agencies in appropriately considering criminal history during the hiring processes, giving qualified applicants a chance to work for the state. This report outlines our evidence-based approach to transforming hiring practices from deficit-based thinking to opportunity-focused evaluation of formerly incarcerated individuals.

## Key initiatives

DES is planning to implement these key initiatives:

- Develop three core training modules addressing bias recognition, skills translation, and supportive onboarding.
- Implement person-first language standards across all training materials.
- Establish partnerships with the Washington Statewide Reentry Council for ongoing program development.

## Expected impact

We expect these initiatives to directly support advancing the state's goal to achieve 40% post-incarceration employment while strengthening the overall quality of state government hiring practices.

# Introduction

[Executive Order 24-03](#) represents Washington state's commitment to building safe and strong communities through successful reentry. As the state agency responsible for training and workforce development, DES plays a crucial role in ensuring supervisors across state government have the tools and knowledge necessary to make fair, legally compliant hiring decisions regarding formerly incarcerated individuals.

This report details our comprehensive approach to supervisor training, moving beyond mere compliance to create meaningful opportunities for qualified candidates with criminal histories.

## Statutory directive

[Executive Order 24-03](#), **Section B.7.a** directs the Department of Enterprise Services to:

*"In coordination with the Office of Financial Management, update training tools for supervisors on the appropriate consideration of criminal history to allow qualified applicants to pursue opportunities for state employment."*

## Background

Research shows that employment following incarceration significantly reduces recidivism rates, which is the frequency of individuals re-offending after released from incarceration. However, traditional hiring practices often create insurmountable barriers for formerly incarcerated individuals, despite their qualifications and potential contributions to the workforce.

Michelle Alexander, an acclaimed civil rights lawyer, advocate, and legal scholar, discussed recidivism rates and the cycle of incarceration in her book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (2010). As her research illustrates, employment barriers are one of the most persistent forms of collateral punishment, creating what she describes as a "permanent underclass" status. Our training initiatives directly address these systemic barriers by transforming how state agencies approach hiring decisions.

## Scope

This report covers DES's plans to develop and implement supervisor training programs, focusing on:

- Establishing a training module and content creation timeline.
- Planning and implementing a pilot program across select state agencies.

- Creating a framework for collaborating with the Washington Statewide Reentry Council.
- Designing and applying methodology for evaluating training effectiveness and participant feedback.
- Developing a statewide rollout strategy and ongoing plans to refine the program.

## Methodology

Our approach will use evidence-based research and best practices from leading organizations in criminal justice reform. Key methods we'll use include:

- **Literature review:** Comprehensive analysis of research on employment barriers and successful reentry practices
- **Stakeholder engagement:** Planned collaboration with the Washington Statewide Reentry Council, formerly incarcerated individuals, and state agency representatives
- **Pilot testing:** Planned implementation of training modules with select state agencies to gather feedback and refine content
- **Data collection:** Pre- and post-training assessments to measure changes in knowledge, attitudes, and hiring practices

## Results

Since this is the first report sharing our progress, results focus on initiatives we have identified and the implementation timeline we're building.

## Initiatives

DES is planning core training initiatives to support state agencies in appropriately considering criminal history during the hiring process.

### Bias recognition training

DES will develop structured exercises to reveal unconscious bias in hiring decisions. This training will include:

- Comparative evaluation tools showing how criminal history affects the assessment of identical qualifications
- Anonymous application review processes to show scoring differences

- Interactive exercises helping participants recognize their own biases

**Expected impact:** Increase in interview opportunities for qualified candidates with criminal backgrounds

## **Skills translation workshops**

We will create frameworks for recognizing valuable skills developed during incarceration, including:

- Practical tools for HR professionals to identify transferable workplace competencies
- Job matching processes that use the full set of skills candidates offer
- Real-world examples of how incarceration experiences translate to workplace skills

**Expected impact:** Improved job placement matching versus defaulting to entry-level positions

## **Supportive onboarding programs**

We will design specialized integration practices for formerly incarcerated employees, including:

- Mentor partnership frameworks
- Resources for supervisors addressing unique reentry challenges
- Best practices for creating inclusive workplace environments

**Expected Impact:** Improved retention rates for justice-involved employees

## **Language and cultural transformation plan**

DES will revise all training materials to use person-first language to replace terms that carry stigma or judgement. This means training materials will use terms such as "returning citizen" and "justice-involved individual" instead of "ex-con" or "offender." We will develop style guides for agencies to apply these consistently across the state.

## **Mindset transformation strategy**

Our training will shift framing from a "second chance" charity model to strategic hiring opportunity, emphasizing unique strengths and perspectives brought by formerly incarcerated individuals and highlighting organizational benefits of diverse life experiences.

# **Implementation timeline**

DES is planning a phased approach to implementing these initiatives that support Executive Order 24-03. As of September 2025, we are currently in the first phase of this work, which focuses on developing training tools and a strategic plan to pilot and implement them.

## **Phase 1: Development (months 1-6)**

- Literature review and best practice research
- Stakeholder engagement and input gathering
- Initial training module development
- Partnership establishment with Statewide Reentry Council

## **Phase 2: Pilot Program (months 7-12)**

- Select six to eight state agencies for pilot implementation
- Deliver training to approximately 100 supervisors and HR professionals
- Collect feedback and effectiveness data
- Refine training materials based on pilot results

## **Phase 3: Statewide Rollout (months 13-24)**

- Deploy training across all state agencies
- Provide ongoing support and technical assistance
- Monitor outcomes and adjust programming as needed
- Report on implementation progress and results

## **Discussion**

The planned implementation of these training initiatives addresses significant opportunities for improving state government hiring practices. Based on research and best practices from other jurisdictions, we anticipate the most substantial barrier will be ingrained perceptual biases that treat criminal history as an automatic disqualifier regardless of job relevance.

### **Key implementation considerations**

During implementation, we will address barriers through education and training. These barriers include:

- Unconscious biases of interviewers and human resource (HR) professionals.
- Understanding how skills developed during incarceration can translate to the workplace.
- Shifting language to reduce biases and promote a welcoming environment.



## **Bias recognition as foundation**

Without structured exercises demonstrating unconscious bias, supervisors consistently underestimate the impact of criminal history on their evaluation processes. The anonymous application review exercise will be particularly important for revealing these biases.

## **Skills translation requires active training**

HR professionals struggle to recognize valuable workplace skills developed during incarceration without specific training. Our training will help them see how a kitchen assignment coordinating meals for hundreds daily demonstrates inventory management, teamwork, and performance under pressure.

## **Language Shapes Perception**

The shift to person-first language will create measurable changes in participant comfort levels and willingness to consider qualified candidates objectively.

# **Recommendations**

To support state agencies in appropriately considering criminal history during the hiring process, DES is recommending immediate actions over the next six months to help plan for the mid- and long-term development and implementation of these strategies.

## **Immediate actions (July 2025-January 2026)**

1. Identify resources: Identify and allocate necessary EED resources for training development and implementation
2. Establish partnerships: Formalize collaboration with the Washington Statewide Reentry Council and other key stakeholders
3. Begin development: Initiate creation of core training modules and supporting materials (September 2025)

## **Medium-term development (6-18 months)**

4. Pilot program launch: Implement pilot programs in select agencies to test and refine training approaches
5. Create assessment tools: Develop comprehensive evaluation instruments to measure training effectiveness

6. Build Support Systems: Establish ongoing technical assistance and support mechanisms for participating agencies

## **Proposed: Long-term systemic changes (18+ months)**

7. Mandatory implementation: Require all state agency supervisors and HR professionals to complete core training modules
8. Policy integration: Embed training requirements into formal state hiring policies and procedures
9. Continuous improvement: Establish regular review and updating of training materials based on outcomes data

## **Conclusions**

The planned development and implementation of comprehensive supervisor training on criminal history consideration represents a crucial step toward achieving Washington state's goal of 40% post-incarceration employment. Our evidence-based approach will transform hiring practices from exclusionary to opportunity-focused while keeping operational effectiveness.

### **Anticipated benefits:**

- Increased employment opportunities for qualified formerly incarcerated individuals
- Improved hiring practices that benefit all candidates
- Reduced discrimination risk
- Strengthened state workforce through diverse perspectives and experiences

### **Critical success factors:**

- Sustained leadership commitment and resource allocation
- Meaningful stakeholder engagement throughout implementation
- Rigorous evaluation and continuous improvement processes
- Clear communication about program goals and expectations

The path forward requires sustained commitment to training development, pilot implementation, and eventual statewide rollout. With proper support and resources,

Washington state can become a national leader in evidence-based reentry employment practices.

## Acknowledgements

This implementation plan reflects the collaborative input and expertise of numerous stakeholders committed to successful reentry outcomes:

- Washington Statewide Reentry Council members for guidance and expertise
- Formerly incarcerated individuals who have and will continue to share their experiences and insights
- State agency supervisors and HR professionals who have provided input on training needs
- Office of Financial Management for coordination and support
- Research institutions providing evidence-based practices and evaluation frameworks

## References

- Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*
- [Executive Order 24-03](#): Building Safe and Strong Communities Through Successful Reentry
- Washington State Pro-Equity Anti-Racism (PEAR) Plan

## Glossary

**Justice-involved individual:** Person-first language referring to someone with experience in the criminal justice system

**Returning citizen:** Person-first language for formerly incarcerated individuals reentering communities

**Skills translation:** Process of identifying valuable workplace competencies developed during incarceration

**Bias recognition training:** Structured exercises revealing unconscious bias in hiring decisions

**DES**