

Discrimination and Inclusivity Issues in State Probation

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The department of corrections is in charge of many different units. Within these units is state probation, more specifically Virginia State probation. There are about 43 district offices in Virginia total so that an office is in charge of several counties at one time. Within these offices is a community of probationers. A community is defined as “group of people who are socially interdependent, who participate together in discussion and decision making, and who share certain practices that both define the community and are nurtured by it (Hardcastle, 2015). This community faces many discriminatory and inclusivity issues to the point it burdens them to live normally and well within society.

Once a person commits a type of offense punishable under criminal law one is then identified as a felon (Wex, 2021). Felons are barred from many jobs ~~after committing a crime~~ especially if it is a fraudulent and or a larceny charge. These jobs include **but are not limited to** a trade, profession, and or bus job that requires licensing, conviction of any serious crime may disqualify an offender from obtaining or holding a license (Saxonhouse, 2004). This **therefor** hinders them and disqualifies them for most employment opportunities that were once available. Another discriminatory action that offenders may face especially if they are a sex offender are housing implications. Due to sex offenders having to sign the registry and publicly disclose where they are living **living** private leasers are less likely to rent to them.

Job discrimination is not a new issue that many face in society, but is a constant daily reminder for those who are trying to redeem themselves. After one commits a crime not only do they face job discrimination they have all their rights **reduced to a pulp**. Once rights are taken away **it** is very hard to get them **back** especially in a changing society. The lack of jobs in such urban towns especially does not allow for an offender to regain their bearings back into society,

which follows the reoffending pathway. The social work profession is ~~all~~ about seeing the dignity and worth of a person no matter their background, race, gender, religion, etc. Yet when it comes to advocating it is not seen much for this population.

Advocating can take place in so many ways for this population. For example there have been programs created to help offenders to get work and places to live that are non-profits. Nonprofits that provide these services include **but are not limited** to LOC Family Services, Good Will, the Women's Prison Association, etc. There are also government funded programs such as The Ticket to work program. From the social work perspective it is important to take action in the form of legislative advocacy and having "brave conversations". Social workers can play a key role in helping create a fair and balanced relationship between the justice system and offenders (Wilson, 2010).

Housing discrimination is also a widely discussed **issue especially** when it comes to housing. Many government programs such as Section 8 Housing **felons are blocked** from. Section 8 Housing is used to help people with low income get affordable housing. Due to criminal background checks being required for many programs such as this one causes an amount of housing issues for the offender community. A lot of offenders are repeat offenders due to the fact that they lack resources to get a stable home away from high crime areas or due to becoming homeless. More than 10% of those coming in and out of prisons and jails are homeless in the months preceding and following their incarceration (McKernan). They repeat offend to have a place to live, eat, and sleep no matter the comfortability of it all.

Job discrimination against offenders at the micro level can be advocated for in such ways as continuing to educate our **higher up officials** of the lack of resources that are provided for offenders. This would then allow for advocating at the mezzo level in terms of research for more

programs that would help offenders positively adjust back into the working field without the fear of being disqualified from certain minimum wage jobs. This would then empower offenders through self-determination to seek employment opportunities and have confidence while doing it. At the macro level through lobbying a policy change should be created for how long a criminal record should be valid in terms of hiring for work. A lot of research and credibility would be needed to back this, but it would allow for the recidivism rate to decrease and reoffending rate to drop.

In direct correlation to job discrimination follows housing discrimination and instability. At the micro level programs once again that help find offenders find homes put them usually in low income housing. This housing is in high crime areas where reoffending is made possible, and without holding a job offenders aren't likely to live in low crime areas. At the micro level social workers can help seek more resources such as programs like LOC Family Services in Farmville. At the mezzo level it can be advocated for more resources to exist like the above named program especially in urban areas where they are lacked. At the macro level a social worker could lobby for a change to the section 8 housing policy and in general for more benefits for offenders. The government has chosen what state benefits offenders receive and what they are disqualified from, but what constitutes what they are able to receive.

Housing and Job discrimination are issues offenders will always face, but something that can be overcome in the future through lobbying efforts and legislation change. These factors are at the root of the issues of discrimination and inclusivity and will continue to be if they are not fought for. The offending population is not one to always be criticized and victimized if they are making efforts to better themselves. Though they shouldn't be overlooked for the crimes they did commit either. Society isn't easy to navigate especially coming out of prison or jail and it is hard

to find resources as it is. All that is being asked is to recognize the dignity and worth of each person in the terms of giving fair chances to the ones that deserve it. There may never be a distinct way to measure that, but restoring and providing fair resources to all may be a start.

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