



## Employment Credits for People on Probation Promote Economy and Public Safety

### At a Glance

---

- Arizona is facing its greatest labor shortage in decades, with 209,000 unfilled jobs.
- Work incentive policies could help fill this gap by encouraging Arizona's 77,000 people on probation to further integrate into the labor force.
- Steady employment promotes public safety by reducing recidivism and interrupting the cycle of crime.
- By implementing evidence-based policies that encourage people on probation to find and maintain full-time work, Arizona can promote both individual accountability and public safety—while also strengthening our economy.



Incentives are among the most powerful tools policymakers can use to achieve their goals. The U.S. government used incentives to increase the number of Americans who own homes; incentives built Arizona’s agricultural sector into a \$23 billion industry; and programs like the Angel Tax Credit have helped Arizona small businesses to grow and prosper.<sup>1</sup> Arizona policymakers can apply these lessons to increase public safety—a key government priority—by expanding probation credits to encourage people to gain and maintain full-time employment while serving sentences in the community. Work incentives allow people on probation to earn time credits that reduce the length of their supervision. Steady employment greatly reduces the risk of recidivism, which means that incentivizing work among people on probation can reduce crime in our communities.<sup>2</sup> Incentivizing employment to expand the workforce will also help Arizona address its worst labor shortage in decades.

## Building on Arizona’s Successes

Arizona already uses incentives in probation policies. In 2008, the legislature enacted earned-time credits that allow people under community supervision to earn time off their sentence by complying with conditions of their probation, including by making restitution payments to victims. The earned-time legislation implemented in Arizona in 2008 successfully reduced the number of people who were returned to jail or prison for violating the conditions of their parole, resulting in significant financial savings from lower levels of incarceration. Since these earned credit policies were implemented, revocations to Arizona prison dropped by 57 percent, saving the state more than \$400 million.<sup>3</sup>

Arizona’s earned-time credits have the potential to be an even more powerful tool by incentivizing additional specific goals. Many other states use earned-time credits for meeting goals beyond general compliance.<sup>4</sup> Texas, for example, offers earned time to people on probation who participate in behavioral programs, such as anger management or substance use counseling, as well as education programs and vocational training.<sup>5</sup> In June 2022, Florida governor Ron DeSantis signed bipartisan legislation that introduced specific workforce incentives as earned-time credits for people on probation.<sup>6</sup> Earned-time credits are an especially powerful tool because they are a strong motivator: A survey of participants in a Utah incentive program showed that 60 percent ranked time reductions as their most valued incentive.<sup>7</sup>

Arizona can use incentives most productively by incentivizing goals that align policymakers’ priorities with the interests of the target population. Employment incentives promote state interests, including public safety and economic growth, as well as individual interests like financial stability and success on supervision.



## Addressing a Labor Force Crisis Through Safe Reintegration of Probation Populations

As of June 2022, Arizona had 209,000 unfilled jobs.<sup>8</sup> Economic dislocations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, inflation, and rising wages, among other factors, have led to a “great reshuffle” with workers quitting jobs in traditionally lower-paying industries in search of jobs in higher paying industries.<sup>9</sup> The greatest labor shortages appear in lower-paying industries, such as accommodation and food service, and wholesale and retail trade, which have large numbers of entry level jobs.<sup>10</sup> Arizona businesses need policies that will help grow and retain a stable workforce, especially in these essential industries.

More than 77,000 people are on probation in Arizona as of August 2022.<sup>11</sup> Research with probation and parole populations consistently indicates that the opportunity to earn reductions in supervision is a powerful motivator.<sup>12</sup> As a result, work incentives provide a substantial motivation for people on probation to participate fully in the workforce. By encouraging tens of thousands of people to integrate fully into the workforce, work incentives can contribute to the economic growth of Arizona.

### The Public Safety Benefits of Incentives

Work incentives also promote public safety and increase accountability within the justice system. Probation revocations make up approximately 26 percent of commitments to Arizona prisons.<sup>13</sup> Strong evidence indicates that steady employment decreases the chances of a person on probation committing a new crime and increases their chances of success under supervision.<sup>14</sup>

The W. P. Carey School of Business at Arizona State University reported that graduates of Televerde, an Arizona program that helps women leaving prison successfully gain and retain employment, experienced a three-year recidivism rate of 5.4 percent compared to a 59 percent recidivism rate among women released from prison nationally.<sup>15</sup> The report attributes this significant difference in recidivism to Televerde graduates’ ability to gain steady employment.

Conversely, a study published in the Federal Probation journal found that 80 percent of those revoked while under community supervision were unemployed.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, incentive policies allow people on probation to demonstrate individual accountability by exceeding the general expectations of probation. This allows probation offices to more easily differentiate between people who are successfully complying with the conditions of their probation and those who may require greater levels of attention. People on probation who gain earned-time credits exit supervision sooner, allowing probation offices to save time, money, and resources while focusing on higher risk populations.<sup>17</sup>

### Policy Solutions

Public safety is a key government responsibility. By implementing following recommendations, state lawmakers can help make all Arizonans safer, while also strengthening the state’s economy.

#### **INCENTIVIZE SUCCESS.**

The Arizona legislature should implement incentives in the state’s criminal justice system that encourage people to expand the state’s workforce, maintain steady employment, and take actions that advance public safety.

#### **MEASURE PROGRESS.**

Arizona should collect and publish data to measure successes as well as remaining challenges. Useful data include the number of people who face revocation hearings each year, the outcomes of those hearings, and lengths of stay in confinement (whether jail or prison).

#### **REINVEST SAVINGS IN SAFETY STRATEGIES THAT WORK.**

Arizonans deserve to be safe. Work incentives are one strategy that the state can pursue that will increase the workforce, expand prosperity, and contribute to the safety of our communities. Beyond the direct safety impacts, incentives are demonstrated to produce significant budgetary savings. The Arizona legislature should reinvest savings created by work incentives into safety strategies that work, such as grants to community-based organizations to provide key victim services and trauma recovery.



Alliance for Safety and Justice (ASJ) is a national advocacy organization that aims to replace ineffective criminal justice system policies with what works to keep people safe. We represent diverse crime survivors and people living with old records as key public safety stakeholders—including more than 1,500 crime survivors in Arizona. ASJ brings our members together with state leaders and coalition partners to win reforms that stop cycles of crime, reduce costly incarceration, and make communities safer. We support a range of “shared safety” reforms, including crime prevention, community health, rehabilitation, economic mobility, and trauma recovery.

For more information, visit: [allianceforsafetyandjustice.org](https://allianceforsafetyandjustice.org)

## Endnotes

- 1 Arizona Department of Agriculture. (n.d.). Annual Report FY2021, <https://agriculture.az.gov/about-us/department-agriculture-reports> and Arizona Commerce Authority. (2021). “Angel Investment”: Small Business Capital Investment,” <https://www.azcommerce.com/media/xy1a9q33/angelinvestment2021.pdf>.
- 2 Sloas, L., Murphy, A., Wooditch, A., and Taxman, F. S. (2019). Assessing the use and impact of points and rewards across four federal probation districts: A contingency management approach. *Victims & Offenders*, 14(7), 811-831; Elbers, J. M., van Ginneken, E. F., Nieuwebeerta, P., Boone, M., and Palmen, H. (2022). The effects of reward systems in prison: A systematic review. *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice*, 71, 100556; Norman, E. M., Wilson, L., Starkey, N. J., and Polaschek, D. L. (2021). How probation officers understand and work with people on community supervision sentences to enhance compliance. *Probation Journal*, 02645505211041579; Sykes, B. L., Ballard, M., Kaiser, D., Mata, V. C., Sharry, J. A., and Sola, J. (2022). Barred: Labor Market Dynamics and Human Capital Development among People on Probation and Parole. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 701(1), 28-45; Krienert, J. L. and Fleisher, M. S. (2001). “Economic Rehabilitation: A Reassessment of the Link Between Employment and Crime,” *Corrections Management Quarterly*, 5 (4), p. 54.
- 3 Nevarez, M. (October 13, 2022). FY 2022 Adult Probation Fact Sheet, <https://www.azcourts.gov/Portals/25/Facts%20Sheet/FY%202022%20APSD%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>.
- 4 For a comparative analysis of earned-time credit programs across several states, see Kurtz, D. (2021 September 7). “Employment-based Earned-Time Credits in Adult Supervision.” Cicero Institute.
- 5 Tex. Code of Criminal Procedure § 42A.702(d) (2021), <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/CR/htm/CR.42A.htm#42A.702>.
- 6 Florida Legislature, Senate Bill 752: Probationary or Supervision Services for Misdemeanor Offenders. (2022), <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2022/752>.
- 7 Sarver, C.M., Seawright, J., and Butters, R.P. (2015). Piloting Utah’s Response and Incentives Matrix: Results from Staff and Stakeholder Surveys. The University of Utah, Utah Criminal Justice Center, [https://socialwork.utah.edu/\\_resources/documents/RIM\\_Survey\\_Results.pdf](https://socialwork.utah.edu/_resources/documents/RIM_Survey_Results.pdf).
- 8 “Worker Shortages by State,” in Ferguson, S. (2022 October 7). “America Works Data Center: Capturing the current state of the U.S. workforce.” US Chamber of Commerce, [https://www.uschamber.com/assets/documents/USCC\\_State\\_Labor\\_Force\\_America-Works-2\\_2022-09-06-203023\\_gtjb.xlsx](https://www.uschamber.com/assets/documents/USCC_State_Labor_Force_America-Works-2_2022-09-06-203023_gtjb.xlsx).
- 9 Ferguson, S. (2022 October 7). “America Works Data Center: Capturing the current state of the U.S. workforce.” US Chamber of Commerce, <https://www.uschamber.com/workforce/america-works-data-center>.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Azcourts.gov. (2022 August 15). Adult Probation Services Data and Research: Monthly Reports, <https://www.azcourts.gov/apsd/Data-and-Research/Monthly-Reports>
- 12 Petersilia, J. (2007). “Employ Behavioral Contracting for ‘Earned Discharge’ Parole.” *Criminology and Public Policy*, 6 (4), p. 810.; Pew Center on the States Public Safety Performance Project. (2008 December 15). “Policy Framework to Strengthen Community Corrections,” [https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pes\\_assets/2008/policy20frameworkpdf.pdf](https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pes_assets/2008/policy20frameworkpdf.pdf).
- 13 This figure is calculated from four months of Institutional Population Movement Reports published by the Arizona Department of Corrections and available online. See Arizona Department of Corrections. (2022) Institutional Population Movement Reports, May 2022, June 2022, and September 2022, [https://corrections.az.gov/sites/default/files/REPORTS/Stats/May2022/adccrimmatestats\\_movement\\_may22.pdf](https://corrections.az.gov/sites/default/files/REPORTS/Stats/May2022/adccrimmatestats_movement_may22.pdf), [https://corrections.az.gov/sites/default/files/REPORTS/Stats/June2022/adccrimmatestats\\_movement\\_june22.pdf](https://corrections.az.gov/sites/default/files/REPORTS/Stats/June2022/adccrimmatestats_movement_june22.pdf), and [https://corrections.az.gov/sites/default/files/REPORTS/Stats/Sep2022/adccrimmatestats\\_ethnic\\_sep22.pdf](https://corrections.az.gov/sites/default/files/REPORTS/Stats/Sep2022/adccrimmatestats_ethnic_sep22.pdf)
- 14 See: Bushway, S. and Reuter, P. (1997). “Labor Markets and Crime Risk Factors” in Sherman, Lawrence, et al, Preventing Crime: What Works, What Doesn’t and What’s Promising. Washington, D.C.: Office of Justice Programs.; Gendreau, P., Goggin, C. and Gray, G. (1998). “Employment.” *Forum on Corrections Research*, 10 (3); Krienert, J. L. and Fleisher, M. (2001). “Economic Rehabilitation: A Reassessment of the Link Between Employment and Crime,” *Corrections Management Quarterly*, 5 (4), p. 54.; Steinmetz, K. F., and Henderson, H. (2016). “Inequality on Probation: An Examination of Differential Probation Outcomes.” *Journal of Ethnicity in Criminal Justice* 14 (1): 1–20.
- 15 Evans, A., Gilmore, T., and Buch, S. (2019). The Economic, Social, and Fiscal Impact of Televerde’s Prison Workforce Program. L. William Seidman Research Institute, W. P. Carey School of Business, Arizona State University, <https://go.televerde.com/rs/838-DWS-841/images/Televerde-Impact-Report-Seidman-Research-Institute-2019.pdf>
- 16 John Rakis. (2005 June). “Improving the Employment Rates of Ex-Prisoners Under Parole,” *Federal Probation* 69(1), [https://www.uscourts.gov/sites/default/files/69\\_1\\_2\\_0.pdf](https://www.uscourts.gov/sites/default/files/69_1_2_0.pdf).
- 17 Pew Center on the States Public Safety Performance Project. (2008 December 15). “Policy Framework to Strengthen Community Corrections,” [https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pes\\_assets/2008/policy20frameworkpdf.pdf](https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pes_assets/2008/policy20frameworkpdf.pdf)