



Newsletter

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Greetings,

As we near the end of 2023, lets look back over the year and revisit some of the undertakings the Mat-Su Reentry Coalition provided to the community.

This year, with funding support from both the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority and the Mat-Su Health Foundation, we were able to provide the Mat-Su Community with several free educational/training events, to include the following:

- Two Community Wide Reentry Coalition Meetings with guest speakers: The [March 2023 Mat-Su Reentry Coalition Community Wide Meeting on Employment and Housing](#) for reentrants and the [December 2023 Mat-Su Reentry Coalition Community Wide Meeting](#) with updates on the Community Care Team and other Resources available in the Mat-Su.
- We held a Reentry Simulation in April 2023. This event is a participatory activity that seeks to raise awareness about the process of reentering the community from a correctional institution.

News coverage of the event:

[Simulation shines spotlight on struggles associated with reentering society after incarceration \(alaskasnewsresource.com\)](#)

- And our two-day in-person 2023 Mat-Su Reentry Summit, which was held in Wasilla, Alaska on September 21 & 22, 2023, ([2023 Mat-Su Reentry Summit](#)). This years Reentry Summit featured both national and statewide experts in the field of criminal justice, mental/behavioral health, and reentry.



2023 Reentry Summit Session with Ian Bick
[Locked In with Ian Bick on Apple Podcasts](#)

The Reentry Summit and Community Wide Meetings were recorded and the links to them are attached and can also be found on our Website at [Mat-Su Valley Reentry Program | Valley Charities Inc.](#)

We look forward to being able to continue to provide free reentry educational/training events in 2024. We already have another Reentry Simulation planned for mid to late February, the exact date is still to be determined, and our 2024 Mat-Su Reentry Summit is scheduled to be held in September 2024. If you are interested in participating in the planning of either of these events please contact me by phone at 907-414-4077 or by e-mail at Barbara.mongar@valleycharities.org.

Barbara Mongar

Coordinator, Mat-Su Reentry Coalition

New York Will Give a “Clean Slate” to Formerly Incarcerated People

By: **Grace Ashford, The New York Times** / Nov 16, 2023

Roughly two million people convicted of crimes in New York may be eligible to have their records sealed as part of a broad criminal justice initiative that was signed into law on Thursday by Gov. Kathy Hochul.

Under the so-called Clean Slate Act, people who complete their sentences and remain out of trouble for a set period — three years for misdemeanors, eight for eligible felonies — will have their convictions sealed. The most serious crimes, including sex crimes, murder and most other Class A felonies, will not be eligible for automatic sealing.

New York is now one of a [dozen states](#) that have enacted such laws, which are aimed at interrupting the cycle of recidivism by enabling formerly incarcerated people access to jobs and housing.

The law will go into effect a year from now, though it will take three more years to clear the records of those currently waiting.

Ms. Hochul said that she was proud to sign the legislation, which she said would provide economic opportunities while protecting public safety.

“The best crime-fighting tool is a good-paying job,” she said.

The bill’s signing is a victory for criminal justice advocates who spent years lobbying stakeholders on behalf of the measure. By the time it passed New York’s Democrat-dominated Legislature earlier this year, it boasted an impressive coalition of business, labor, government and advocacy groups who preached of its economic, moral and public safety benefits.

Indeed, one of the biggest ostensible hurdles was Ms. Hochul herself, who over her two years in power has split with progressives over some criminal justice measures, citing public safety concerns.

While Ms. Hochul was supportive of the general concept of the initiative, and included a scaled-back version in her legislative agenda last year, she expressed concern over the scope of the initial bill.

Ultimately, the governor was able to extract concessions from its sponsors before its passage, including an extended waiting period and liability protections for businesses that hire people who have criminal records. Records will remain visible to law enforcement and court personnel, as well as certain sensitive employers.

Unlike previous iterations of the bill, the final version makes all Class A felonies, except those related to drug possession, ineligible for sealing.

The concessions helped to quiet opposition, including from law enforcement groups. While the major sheriffs', police and prosecutors' associations have not backed the measure, they have refrained from publicly criticizing it.

An analysis from the Division of Criminal Justice Services showed that roughly 1 million felonies and up to 4 million misdemeanor convictions would be eligible for sealing. **(Continued on page 3)**



Gov. Kathy Hochul said the Clean Slate Act would provide economic opportunities to millions of people without harming public safety.

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Employers can be hesitant to hire someone with a criminal record — a bias that the U.S. Chamber of Commerce [has said depresses the economy, amounting to](#) \$78 billion to \$87 billion in lost gross domestic product.

The impact on people and their families is more direct: New Yorkers living with criminal records miss out on roughly \$2.4 billion in wages annually, according to [a report](#) from the New York City comptroller, Brad Lander. Nearly 80 percent of them are nonwhite.

Ismael Diaz Jr. served nine and a half years in prison after pleading guilty to manslaughter. After he got out, he said he struggled to find employment — once losing a job he had already gotten because of a late-arriving background check.

Today he works as a community organizer for the Center for Community Alternatives, a group that pushes for criminal justice reform, including Clean Slate. Mr. Diaz said he was “ecstatic” about the law’s passage, which he says will lift the burden for him and others.

He knows the law will take several years to go into effect, but he hopes its passage could encourage employers to start hiring people now — regardless of their records.

“I’m hoping that the law gets signed, that people will say, ‘You know what, let’s change it now,’” he said. “Cause if we wait for three years, it’s still three years we can’t get a job.”

Jamie Dimon, chief executive of JP Morgan Chase, said he was “thrilled” Ms. Hochul was signing the bill, citing not only New York’s many open jobs, but also the positive impact those jobs would have on the people who filled them.

“Jobs bring dignity, jobs bring household formation, jobs bring lower crime,” Mr. Dimon, one of the most powerful proponents of second-chance legislation in the country, said in an interview. “Jobs lift up people.”

Many Republicans still oppose the legislation, saying it may seal records that they believe ought to remain public. They point to the existing process for sealing records, in which a judge approves each request.

Senate Minority Leader Robert Ort, who represents the Niagara Falls area, said he was disappointed in Ms. Hochul’s decision and skeptical of the law’s projected economic benefits.

“I do not think this is going to solve the employee shortage that our employers are seeing here,” he said.

“We continue to pass legislation like this that is really geared toward those who have broken the law, the criminal class, and not those who might be victims,” he lamented.

Mat-Su Reentry Events:

- **Virtual Mat-Su Reentry Services Forum**
Wednesday, Dec 20
10:00 to 11:00 AM

The Mat-Su Reentry Coalition and Reentry Case Management Program invites you to join us in a virtual Reentry Services Forum every third Wednesday of the month. Service providers, Field PO’s, Institutional PO’s, Case Managers, and anyone interested in attending are welcome.

For questions or zoom link to the above event please contact

Barbara Mongar at:
barbara.mongar@valleycharities.org

- **Big Cabbage Radio Valley Edition: Reentry Nov 19, 2023 :**

<https://www.bigcabbageradio.org/2023/11/19/valley-edition-reentry-2023-11-17/>

Radio interview with reentry case manager Brian Galloway; Brian describes the reentry program for assisting incarcerated individuals as they return to society.

Knik Tribe Events:

Knik Tribe Family Culture

Nights — Every other Wednesday, 5:30 - 7:30 PM; Location: 758 Shoreline Dr. Wasilla, AK; Open to All Food / Family / Fun
Compact@KnikTribe.org
907-373-7991

- **Talking Circle**—Tuesday, at 6:30 and Wednesday at 5:30; Same location above;
Contact Ralph Lewis at 907-841-9773
- **Talking Circle**—Thursday, from 12 to 2PM; Location: Willow Library, Willow, AK

Mat-Su Reentry Coalition

The Mat-Su Reentry Coalition is a collaboration of individuals, community stakeholders, public and not-for-profit agencies, faith-based and business partners who are united and committed to reducing recidivism among returning citizens to the Mat-Su community.

Our Mission

To promote public safety by identifying and implementing strategies that increase former prisoners' wellbeing within the community and reduce the likelihood of their return to prison through recidivating.

We will accomplish this by:

- Improved communication and collaboration between Alaska Department of Corrections (DOC) and the community.
- Building community partnerships to strengthen local services.
- Identifying barriers for those being released from incarceration and taking an active role in addressing those concerns.
- Promoting community educational and training opportunities for those releasing regarding resources.
- Work in conjunction with Alaska DOC to inform and promote reentry efforts in Alaska.

Note: For more information on the Mat-Su Reentry Coalition contact Barbara.mongar@valleycharities.org or go to our Webpage at [Mat-Su Valley Reentry Program | Valley Charities Inc](#)



Mat-Su Job Center Update

By: **Amanda Carlson**, Mat-Su Job Center Manager

The Department of Labor & Workforce Development has 14 job centers statewide to connect job seekers and employers, our centers are open Monday-Friday 8am-5pm. The most up to date contact information for each job center can be found by visiting <https://jobs.alaska.gov/offices/>. The Mat-Su job center is located at 877 W. Commercial Drive in Wasilla and our main line is (907) 352-2500. Our center has two conference rooms available for partners or community members at no cost that can accommodate recruitments, staff training, testing, or meetings. One of the conference rooms has a computer lab of 15 computers available. If you are interested in learning more or to schedule a time to see the space, call our main line.

The Department of Labor & Workforce Development Newsroom provides monthly updates regarding unemployment rates, wage/salary information, and regional employment changes. It was announced Alaska's Minimum Wage will increase in 2024. In 2014 Alaska voters passed a ballot initiative to annually adjust the minimum wage for inflation. The current minimum wage will increase from \$10.85 to 11.73 effective Jan. 1, 2024. If you would like to stay up to date on employment and economic development trends visit <https://labor.alaska.gov/news/home.htm> and click on subscribe.

The Seafood Employment Office is actively recruiting seafood workers for seafood and fishing jobs in Alaska. These positions can be an excellent way for individuals to gain employment with room, board and transportation provided. Interested applicants please visit <https://jobs.alaska.gov/seafood/> or contact the Seafood Employment Office at the Anchorage Job Center Midtown by phone (907) 269-4746. Another industry that is always recruiting and can be a good fit for those that need room, board and transportation is the Maritime Industry visit mymaritimecareer.org to learn more.

For the most up to date information on recruitments, job fairs, virtual job readiness workshops and job training opportunities please visit Alaska's Job Center Network at <http://www.jobs.alaska.gov/> and choose from options on the right main menu.



December Trends: Alaska aquaculture is a blooming industry. Also inside, a look at commuting and at teacher pay.

Monthly Highlight of Resources in the Mat-Su:

- **Food Bank:** 5099 East Blue Lupine Drive, Wasilla; Mon-Fri 10:00 am to 1:00 pm; 907-357-3769; Website: [Home \(matsufoodbank.org\)](http://matsufoodbank.org)
- **Valley Charities Medical Equipment Lending Program:** 2521 E Mountain Village Dr., Suite D-1, Wasilla; Hours of operation: Tues-Sat: 10:00 am to 4:00 pm; Phone 907-521-1908; Website: [Medical Equipment Lending - Valley Charities](#)