

# Idaho Stands to Gain from Reducing Employment Barriers for People with Criminal Records

Winter 2021

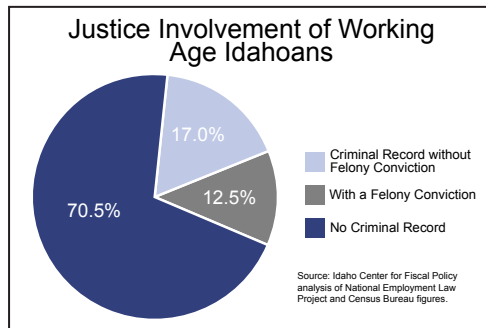


**IDAHO**  
Center for  
Fiscal Policy

Idahoans with a criminal record encounter lifelong challenges long after a sentence is completed. Some of these challenges - which can be more severe than the sentence applied by the courts - also have consequences for Idaho's economy. These Idahoans face steep barriers to finding good jobs that would enable them to provide for themselves and their families and contribute to their communities and local economies. Idaho stands to gain from enacting policies that reduce barriers to Idahoans with criminal records.

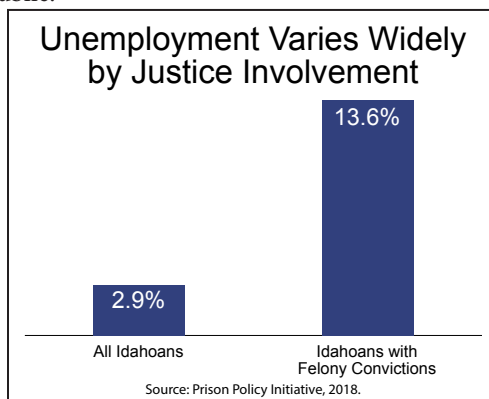
## 1. A significant share of Idahoans have been involved with the justice system.

One in three working age Idahoans has a criminal record, and more than one in ten working age Idahoans (age 18-64) has a felony conviction.<sup>1</sup> These Idahoans face additional barriers to gaining employment due to their entanglements with the criminal justice system. Current law allows Idahoans with criminal records, including people with little or no public safety risk, to be excluded in job postings or screened out in the first stages of the hiring process. Having a criminal record can also make it difficult - or even impossible - for an individual to work in a given field that requires a professional license.



## 2. Idahoans with felony convictions experience higher rates of unemployment than other Idahoans.

Formerly incarcerated individuals experience unemployment at a rate 4.7 percent higher than the general population (2.9 percent compared with 13.6 percent). As a result, an estimated 17,962 Idahoans with felony convictions were unemployed in 2019 - 14,132 more than if their unemployment rate mirrored that of the general public.

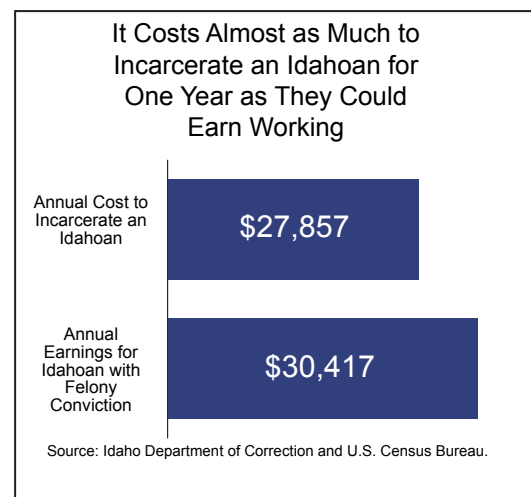


## 3. Barriers to employment resulted in half a billion in lost wages in 2019.

If Idahoans with a felony conviction were employed at the same rate as Idahoans overall, their earnings could generate as much as \$546 million over the course of a year. The average Idahoan with a felony conviction who was unable to find employment due to a criminal history lost \$30,417 in wages in 2019, or the equivalent of the median wage for an Idahoan with a high school degree or similar credential.<sup>2</sup>

## 4. One year of prison costs nearly as much as a year's salary in Idaho.

Formerly incarcerated Idahoans who are able to secure stable employment are less likely to become entangled with the criminal justice system again. Prisons amount to \$276.7 million in operating costs every year (additional capital funds are required for building and expanding prisons). Investing public dollars into workforce development and community re-entry programs will benefit Idahoans returning from prison, their families and their communities.



1. Using prison population trends, this analysis assumed that 3 percent of Idahoans with felony convictions are above working age.  
2. This analysis assumed that all working-age Idahoans with felony convictions attained a high school diploma or equivalent.