



## 2023 California Policy Priorities

With clients who face thousands of barriers and collateral consequences resulting from having a conviction history, it can be difficult to narrow the focus to any single issue or to elevate any specific barrier to successful reentry. All impacts from barriers that people face post-incarceration compound on one another, and even reinforce each other. For example, barriers to employment can lead to financial hardship, which in turn can lead to difficulty affording housing. And lack of housing, in turn, can reinforce other impacts of conviction history, like parental rights in custody, education access, food security, or access to other supportive services. Nonetheless, we've tried to focus our efforts on components of reentry systems that we see most regularly as concerns for our clients, people who are directly impacted by the barriers they face upon release from prison or jail.

The following are the main barriers our clients face as they come home and therefore are elevated to policy priorities Root & Rebound will be focusing on for 2023.

### Increasing Protections and Access to Meaningful Employment

Long before the pandemic, formerly incarcerated people had higher rates of unemployment than the general public. And just like the general public, formerly incarcerated people need stable jobs to support themselves and their loved ones. However, even with the enacted Fair Chance Act, there are weak protections for the people of California from unlawful discrimination in employment and business. Additionally, these *protections* do not apply in the occupational licensing field. As a way to increase protections and access to meaningful employment for our clients and other formerly incarcerated people, Root & Rebound will focus on the following changes:

- Expand on the Fair Chance Act to strengthen the rights and protections of our clients and other formerly incarcerated people.
- Improving access to state summary criminal records and the process to correct errors in those records will support clients in the many occupational licenses and employment that require more extensive background checks that rely on those state summary records.

### Eliminating Discrimination in Housing

Housing is the basis of stability and security for an individual or family. It is the foundation that allows for successful reentry for our clients and other formerly incarcerated people. Without stable housing, securing employment and participating in activities is extremely difficult. However, there are myriad barriers that prevent formerly incarcerated individuals from finding stable housing. To ensure our clients and other formerly incarcerated people have that foundational support with stable housing, Root & Rebound will focus on the following changes:

- Remove structural barriers to housing by passing Fair Chance Housing laws that eliminate background checks in rental housing advertising, applications, and decision-making.



- Eliminate “crime free” housing programs that target people with conviction histories and disproportionately impact and displace people of color.

### **Reforming Parole and Probation to Ensure Opportunity Post-Incarceration**

California’s parole system is flawed. As many of our clients and formerly incarcerated people know firsthand, while being on parole or probation means they are no longer behind bars, it does not mean they have the freedom to live as they please. People on parole are subject to a variety of strict rules and oppressive terms and conditions that are overbroad, and how they are enforced is left up to the parole agent’s discretion. To ensure our clients and people on parole have opportunities post-incarceration, Root & Rebound will focus on the following changes:

- Create an accountability mechanism for parole and probation officers so they do not inflict harm on our clients and other formerly incarcerated people.
- Ensure that parole officers provide housing to people on parole when they need and request housing support.

***Beyond these three specific policy priorities, Root & Rebound continues to help formerly incarcerated people navigate the legal impact of a criminal record on their lives. This includes:***

- *Establishing the building blocks of reentry:* With the passage of SB 629 (Chapter 645, 2021), formerly incarcerated people returning home from prison can obtain an original California identification card. However, they need to have specific documents showing proof of who they are in order to acquire an identification card. Therefore, Root & Rebound will build on this law by ensuring all incarcerated persons also have access to a free birth certificate.
- *Extending the resumption of child support obligation timeframe:* It often takes two to three years for formerly incarcerated people to find stable employment as it is more common for them to have inconsistent and unreliable employment. As a result, formerly incarcerated parents struggle to make child support payments and end up further behind in their obligations. There should be enough time provided to formerly incarcerated parents owing child support to seek stable employment and obtain financial stability before requiring these obligations. Therefore, Root & Rebound seeks to extend the resumption of the child support obligation timeframe to the 18th month after release and requires a modification hearing to adjust the amount owed by the formerly incarcerated parent in order to account for their current financial status.
- *Supporting reunifying parents and their children:* When a child in the California child welfare system is removed from their parents’ care, parents typically are entitled to receive reunification services to regain custody, including incarcerated parents. In reality, the services offered often fall well below the bare minimum required to enable a family to reunify, and this is especially challenging for incarcerated parents. Therefore, Root & Rebound is working with its partners to ensure parents who have not received reasonable reunification services will receive an additional six months of services to ensure that



parents of all backgrounds or abilities are given a fair opportunity to reunify with their children before having their parental rights terminated.

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### *About Root & Rebound*

Root & Rebound (R&R) is a national criminal justice reform and reentry advocacy 501(c)(3) organization that addresses racial, economic, and social injustices by restoring and protecting rights, dignity, and opportunities for people directly impacted by the criminal justice system. With offices across California and in South Carolina, R&R works in these two very different locales, as well as with partners nationally, to directly support those who have been most harmed by mass incarceration and to change the systems, laws, and policies that perpetuate that harm.

### *Our Mission*

R&R's mission is to support people navigating reentry and reduce the harms perpetuated by mass incarceration.

### *Community Centered Policy*

R&R is committed to ensuring that our policy advocacy accurately reflects the lived experiences and expertise of directly-impacted people and the reentry barriers they experience. We host two groups so they have an opportunity to build the power of the community we serve while also improving the policies that we pursue.

- The *Policy Advisory Council* is made up of current and former clients who are formerly incarcerated and directly impacted by the criminal legal system. They provide opportunities for directly impacted people to engage in the policy process at Root & Rebound more closely and robustly.
- The *Valley Impacted Voices in Action Coalition*, originated out of our Central Valley work, aims to change the harmful narratives that plague system-impacted families, build collective power, and bring together formerly incarcerated people, their loved ones, and advocates from rural communities in six Central Valley Counties: Merced, Madera, Fresno, Tulare, Kern, and Kings to help better shape and reimagine the communities in which we live.