

# REENTRY MYTH

# BUSTER!

A Product of the Federal Interagency Reentry Council

**MYTH: People with criminal records are automatically barred from all employment.**

**FACT: An arrest or conviction record does NOT automatically bar individuals from all employment**

On April 25, 2012, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission issued its *Enforcement Guidance on the Consideration of Arrest and Conviction Records in Employment Decisions Under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964*, as amended (Title VII), 42 U.S.C. § 2000e. The Guidance updates, consolidates, and supersedes the Commission's 1987 and 1990 policy statements on this issue, as well as the relevant discussion in the EEOC's 2006 Race and Color Discrimination Compliance Manual Chapter. These rules apply to all employers that have 15 or more employees, including private sector employers, the federal government, and federal contractors. Below are answers to common questions about the Guidance.

**1) Does this Guidance prohibit employers from obtaining and using criminal background reports about job applicants or employees?** No, the Guidance does not prohibit employers from obtaining or using arrest or conviction records to make employment decisions. The EEOC simply seeks to ensure that such information is not used in a discriminatory way.

**2) How could an employer use criminal history information in a discriminatory way?** Two ways -- First, Title VII prohibits disparate treatment discrimination. Employers should not treat job applicants or employees with the same criminal records differently because of their race, national origin, or another protected characteristic (disparate treatment discrimination). Second, Title VII prohibits disparate impact discrimination. Employers should not use a policy or practice that excludes people with certain criminal records if the policy or practice significantly disadvantages individuals of a particular race, national origin, or another protected characteristic, and does not accurately predict who will

be a responsible, reliable, or safe employee. In legal terms, it is not "job related and consistent with business necessity."

**3) How would an employer prove "job related and consistent with business necessity"? Is it burdensome?** Proving that a criminal record exclusion is "job related and consistent with business necessity" is not burdensome. The employer can prove this if it (1) considers at least the nature of the crime, time since the criminal conduct occurred, and the nature of the job in question, and (2) gives an individual who may be excluded by the screen an opportunity to show why he or she should not be excluded.

**4) Why should an arrest record be treated differently than a conviction record?**

An arrest record does not establish that a person engaged in criminal conduct. Arrest records may also be inaccurate (e.g., mistakenly identify the arrestee) or incomplete (e.g., do not state whether charges were filed or dismissed against the arrestee). Thus, an arrest record alone should not be used by an employer to take an adverse employment action. But, an arrest may trigger an inquiry into whether the conduct underlying the arrest justifies an adverse employment action.

#### For More Information:

EEOC Enforcement Guidance on the Consideration of Arrest and Conviction Records in Employment Decisions Under Title VII:  
[http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/arrest\\_conviction.cfm](http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/arrest_conviction.cfm)

EEOC Questions and Answers About the EEOC's Enforcement Guidance on the Consideration of Arrest and Conviction Records in Employment Decisions Under Title VII:  
[http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/qa\\_arrest\\_conviction.cfm](http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/qa_arrest_conviction.cfm)

**What is a REENTRY MYTH BUSTER?** This Myth Buster is one in a series of fact sheets intended to clarify existing federal policies that affect formerly incarcerated individuals and their families. Each year, more than 700,000 individuals are released from state and federal prisons. Another 9 million cycle through local jails. When reentry fails, the social and economic costs are high -- more crime, more victims, more family distress, and more pressure on already-strained state and municipal budgets.

Because reentry intersects with health and housing, education and employment, family, faith, and community well-being, many federal agencies are focusing on initiatives for the reentry population. Under the auspices of the Cabinet-level interagency Reentry Council, federal agencies are working together to enhance community safety and well-being, assist those returning from prison and jail in becoming productive citizens, and save taxpayer dollars by lowering the direct and collateral costs of incarceration.

For more information about the Reentry Council, go to: [www.nationalreentryresourcecenter.org/reentry-council](http://www.nationalreentryresourcecenter.org/reentry-council)