

Jan. 13, 2021 - Chairman Plousis Marks the First Anniversary of Reentry Legislation

It was one year ago, on January 21, 2020, that Governor Murphy enacted legislation that gave the Casino Control Commission discretion to issue Casino Key Employee Licenses to former offenders who were convicted of certain drug offenses and successfully completed drug court. The legislation bolstered the Commission's recent efforts to work with government partners, including the New Jersey Judiciary and the State Parole Board, to help rehabilitated people overcome barriers that historically inhibited them from fully participating in the liberty and prosperity enjoyed by other New Jerseyans. The casino gaming industry has a notable history of mentoring employees from entry level to key positions. By opening the door to advancement in the industry, the legislation has the potential to be a real game changer for people in giving them a second chance.

The Commission's vision—to be a key partner and catalyst in promoting the general welfare, health, and prosperity of Atlantic City, the Greater Atlantic City Region, and the State of New Jersey—calls us to be engaged in the South Jersey region bringing awareness to potential employment opportunities in the casino industry for former offenders. Now, as required by the new law, we coordinate with non-profit reentry organizations to provide formerly incarcerated individuals with information about their recently gained key license eligibility.

Throughout 2019 and in early 2020, the Commission sent representatives across the region to provide information to incarcerated persons who were preparing for release and reemployment. We attended events including the Second Chance Career & Resource Expo at the Cumberland County Library. We attended the reentry conference at the South Woods State Prison. We also strengthened our rapport with the community while attending numerous safe surrender events and expungement seminars hosted by the New Jersey Judiciary.

Support from potential employers is just as critical. The likelihood of long-term success for former offenders is, in a large part, determined by their ability to obtain gainful employment and establish a career. As such, the Commission set out to focus attention on the benefits available to employers who hire former offenders. During 2019, we hosted two well-attended forums for employers in the casino industry, in cooperation with the Division of Gaming Enforcement, N.J. Department of Corrections, N.J. Department of Labor and Workforce Development, and the N.J. State Parole Board. The first event focused on improving awareness among the casino hotels and it was very well received by the industry. The second forum was open to an expanded audience including members of the Greater Atlantic City Chamber.

While the legislation enacted by Governor Murphy formally established a course to be followed, positive momentum has suffered as a result of the unprecedented global pandemic. To mitigate the spread of the virus, casinos were closed to the public on March 16, 2020 and remained closed until July 2020. The ramifications for employment in Atlantic City were tragic. Before the crisis, the casinos directly employed 26,000 people and almost 20,000 of them were full time. Third party businesses, most notably restaurants and retail shops, employed many more. Upon reopening, prudent restrictions on capacity, amenities, and entertainment were needed. While many employees have since been called back to work, thousands remain furloughed, dramatically increasing the competition among applicants for a limited number of jobs.

The unfortunate reality is that people seeking reentry employment during the pandemic face limited options. As society begins to approach a return to normalcy, we recognize a redoubling of our efforts will be needed to restore the recent positive momentum. Reentry groups have resumed planning activities and are looking toward a better future. The Commission stands ready to continue this indispensable work—to ensure that the recent gains for the rehabilitated will not be lost—and that rehabilitated former offenders will have real opportunities to participate in the coming recovery.

For more information, including a full list of agency partners, visit the Casino Control Commission's reentry webpage, www.NJCCC.gov/Reentry.