



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
BRUCE RAUNER

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Video of the event is available [here](#).

New program helps former offenders become entrepreneurs

Increased economic opportunity an important component of Gov. Rauner's criminal justice reform goals

CHICAGO (Nov. 6, 2017) — Gov. Bruce Rauner is announcing a new, innovative program to help formerly incarcerated men and women start their own businesses.

The Pathway to Enterprise for Returning Citizens (PERC) program is the first of its kind in Illinois. In its pilot phase, the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) will screen candidates and select 125 people who are returning to communities on the south and west sides of Chicago. When they go home, they will receive in-depth training and coaching on how to run a business. This program will give them the opportunity to spur economic development and create jobs in the same communities in which they live.

“One of my most important goals since taking office has been to fix our broken criminal justice system and give people a real chance at success when they are released from prison,” Rauner said. “This program not only allows us to create jobs in underserved communities, it also drives down the recidivism rate and sets families on the right course.”

The program highlights Rauner's commitment to equip incarcerated men and women with the tools they need to make a smoother transition back to the community. Earlier this year, he also initiated a five-year pilot program that provides them with training on how to prepare a budget, write a business plan, set realistic goals, and build interpersonal relationship skills. The governor also has created a pathway for former offenders to get a state ID, access to their birth certificates, and professional licenses in healthcare fields and cosmetology. The Illinois prison population is down 12 percent since Rauner took office in 2015.

“We are laser focused on improving outcomes for the men and women who leave our custody,” said IDOC Director John Baldwin. “Many of them have entrepreneurial minds and this program is just what they need to hone their skills and build a better life for themselves.”

Training services for the PERC program will be provided by The Safer Foundation of Illinois, Bethel New Life in the Austin neighborhood, Chatham Business Association, North Lawndale Employment

Network, and Sunshine Enterprises, based in Woodlawn. Those who complete the program successfully will be positioned to receive a privately funded loan of up to \$50,000 to launch their businesses.

The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA) will monitor the program. “Our researchers will keep a close watch on the PERC program,” said ICJIA Executive Director John Maki. “We will be measuring its effectiveness so that the leadership team can make sure it’s working to improve public safety outcomes.”

PERC is created through a public-private partnership between the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA), IDOC, the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) and the Chicago Neighborhood Initiative Micro Finance Group (CNIMFG), which will underwrite loans for the start-up capital.

“This program leverages the resources of three state agencies and a nonprofit,” said Randy Kurtz, deputy director at ICJIA. “It is testimony to what can be done when organizations work together.”

“We’re excited and honored to be part of this program,” said Erica King, vice president at the CNIMFG. “It will empower returning citizens to create opportunities for others to follow, which tracks closely our CNIMFG mission.”

More than \$1 million was raised from private-sector foundations, including Citibank Foundation, The Chicago Community Trust, the Perry Family Foundation, US Bank and the Hughes Foundation, to get the program off the ground.

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