



NEWS from the Shelby County Mayor's Office

Lee Harris, Mayor

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MEDIA RELEASE

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**SHELBY COUNTY GOVERNMENT RECEIVES NATIONAL RECOGNITION FOR
INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO SECOND CHANCE EMPLOYMENT**

In May 2023, Shelby County launched WorkToBreakTheCycle.com, a website that provides open positions for individuals with criminal histories.

Shelby County, TN – NewDEAL, Developing Exceptional American Leaders, announced Shelby County Government's second chance initiative, “Work to the Break the Cycle,” as a top five finalist in the 2023 National Ideas Challenge. The Ideas Challenge was open to nearly 200 NewDEALers and their policy ideas to spur economic growth. The top five national submissions were then selected by a panel of nationally recognized policy experts, including Jorge Elorza, CEO of Democrats for Education Reform, Patrik Gaspard, President & CEO of the Center for American Progress, and Rep. Ann McLane Kuster, U.S. Representative (NG) & Chair of the New Democrat Coalition.

WorkToBreakTheCycle.com is a Shelby County job site that provides open positions for individuals with criminal histories who are looking for meaningful employment. Since its inception, more than 150 people with adverse backgrounds have been hired. Studies show meaningful employment can reduce recidivism, and Shelby County is encouraging local employers to follow the lead in setting up special portals that are user-friendly.

Shelby County Mayor Lee Harris: “Meaningful, stable, and sustainable employment can help ensure individuals do not re-offend and create new victims of crime. Our jobs on WorkToBreakTheCycle.com offer benefits like a living wage, paid parental leave, and healthcare coverage. I believe expanding these second chance opportunities has a ripple impact on our

community by promoting local economic engagement, reducing incarceration expenses, and improving public safety.”

Jerri Green, Senior Policy Advisor to Mayor Lee Harris: “We believe that each hire is a marker of success. We know over 90 percent of people in prison will be released. By providing re-entry opportunities, individuals with conviction or arrest histories can receive meaningful employment that reduces the chances they will re-offend.”

Gerald Thornton, Shelby County Director of Human Resources: “As of today, we have proactively hired about 160 people with criminal records just by looking at the applications and the job requirements, duties, and responsibilities. These new hires are staying on the job, and we are only seeing positive outcomes so far.”

DeAndre Brown, Shelby County Office of Re-entry Director: “If we want to have a safe community, we must treat everyone with the same dignity, honor, and respect regardless of the fact they may have made bad decisions. Our challenge is seeing people for who they are, not for their worst or best decision. Just see them as human and give them an opportunity.”

To learn more about this initiative:

<https://worktobreakthecycle.com/>

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