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### **Program to Help Ex-Prisoners Stay in the Labor Market Shows Success**

Philadelphia—Impressive numbers of ex-prisoners participating in the Ready4Work program are finding and keeping employment and avoiding a return to prison, according to new research released by Public/Private Ventures (P/PV), the nonprofit organization that partnered with federal agencies and private foundations to create and oversee the three-year national demonstration project. Almost 60 percent of all participants found a job while enrolled in the program, with about a third remaining employed for at least six consecutive months; more striking, participants' recidivism rates are considerably lower than national averages compiled by the federal Bureau of Justice Statistics. Just 1.9 percent of Ready4Work participants returned to state prison with a new offense within six months of their release (compared with 5 percent nationally), and only 5 percent did so within one year (compared to 10.4 percent nationally). P/PV researchers caution that without a formal control group definitive conclusions about the program's effectiveness cannot be drawn; despite these caveats they describe Ready4Work's outcomes as extremely promising.

P/PV President, Fred Davie said "We are pleased with the results of Ready4Work on several levels. Clearly, we are happy with the outcomes, especially for a seemingly intractable societal challenge. We are also impressed by the effectiveness of the partnerships forged with community-based and faith-based providers in 17 urban areas across the country and with hundreds of small businesses and public agencies that supported this effort."

Finding employment for former prisoners has become a serious national challenge. Every year, nearly 650,000 adults return from custody to their communities—most often to poor neighborhoods with few resources to help them reintegrate effectively, and where their presence may threaten to disrupt already fragile households and social structures. Yet, while many families struggle with basic necessities, more than \$60 billion a year is spent on prisons and jails.

"The enormous challenges facing men and women as they try to reenter society after prison is one of the great social problems of our time," says Harry Holzer, a professor of Public Policy at Georgetown University and an expert on issues affecting ex-prisoners and other disadvantaged workers. "If we can identify cost-effective approaches to helping offenders reenter, it could reduce crime and prison costs and help millions of poor families and their communities. The P/PV study shows that Ready4Work is a promising approach that certainly merits further interest."

Past research has shown that ex-prisoners with steady jobs and strong social bonds have lower recidivism rates, but many find it difficult to obtain stable employment and establish positive relationships. The Ready4Work model addresses both issues: Services include employment-readiness training, job placement, and referrals for housing, health care, and drug treatment. The program also involves a unique mentoring component designed to ease ex-prisoners' reentry by providing emotional and practical support. Ready4Work sites have provided about half of participants with mentors, and those participants have done particularly well—preliminary evidence suggests that mentoring may play a role in retaining enrollees in the program and helping them find and keep jobs. To date, Ready4Work has enrolled more than 4,500 formerly incarcerated men and women, who can each receive services for up to one year.

Ready4Work: An Ex-Prisoner, Community and Faith Initiative was launched by Public/Private Ventures and the US Department of Labor, with additional support from the Annie E. Casey and Ford foundations, in 2003. The initiative relies on partnerships among local faith, justice, business and social service organizations in 11 cities: Chicago, Detroit, Houston, Jacksonville, Los Angeles, Memphis, Milwaukee, New York (East Harlem), Oakland, Philadelphia, and Washington.

P/PV's findings are published in Ready4Work In Brief, available at [www.ppv.org](http://www.ppv.org).

Public/Private Ventures is a national nonprofit organization whose mission is to improve the effectiveness of social policies, programs and community initiatives.