

Youth Have Lifelong Barriers to Employment

The negative consequences of prosecuting and sentencing youth in the adult system do not end when a youth avoids, or is released from, incarceration. An adult conviction can limit a youth's opportunities for the rest of his or her life. While most juvenile records are sealed, adult convictions become public record and, depending on the state and the crime, can limit a youth's job prospects for a lifetime. The Legal Action Center report, *After Prison: Roadblocks to Reentry: A Report on State Legal Barriers Facing People with Criminal Records*, has revealed several facts about legal barriers for people with criminal records:

- Most states allow employers to deny jobs to people arrested but never convicted of a crime;
- Most states allow employers to deny jobs to anyone with a criminal record, regardless of how old or minor the record or the individual's work history and personal circumstances;
- Most states make criminal history information accessible to the general public through the Internet, making it extremely easy for employers and others to discriminate against people on the basis of old or minor convictions, for example to deny employment or housing; and
- All but two states restrict in some way the right to vote for people with criminal convictions.¹

When states make it difficult for youth to get jobs, states hamper their own economic growth.

Given the diversity of state transfer laws, for many states it may also mean they are putting their own residents at a disadvantage when competing for jobs with youth from other states. For example, consider two 16-year-olds who are arrested for shoplifting. One is from North Carolina, the other from Tennessee. In Tennessee, a youth arrested for shoplifting is likely to be prosecuted in the juvenile system and probably would not have to report his or her youthful indiscretion. However, a youth arrested for the same crime in North Carolina will be charged as an adult and will have an adult criminal conviction for life.



¹ *After Prison: Roadblocks to Reentry: A Report on State Legal Barriers Facing People with Criminal Records*. (2004) New York, New York: The Legal Action Center. Updated here: <http://www.lac.org/roadblocks-to-reentry/upload/lacreport/Roadblocks-to-Reentry--2009.pdf>.