

Drugs, Crimes, & Consequences:

An Update on Criminal Justice Involvement as
a Barrier to Employment and the Significance of
Social Enterprises to Fair Chance Hiring



Great Cities Institute
UNIVERSITY OF
ILLINOIS CHICAGO

Prepared for: **NORTH LAWNGDALE EMPLOYMENT NETWORK (NLEN)**
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**NORTH LAWNGDALE
EMPLOYMENT
NETWORK**

Creating a community that works

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Forward

For more than two decades, the North Lawndale Employment Network (NLEN) has demonstrated what is possible when communities most impacted by economic exclusion and mass incarceration are not treated as problems to be managed, but as partners and leaders in building solutions. This report, “Drugs, Crime, and Consequences,” offers both a rigorous analysis of the enduring barriers facing North Lawndale and a compelling affirmation of what works—community-rooted, evidence-informed, and dignity-centered approaches to workforce development and reentry.

NLEN’s work stands out because it does not separate employment from the broader conditions required for stability and opportunity. Instead, NLEN has built an integrated model that recognizes a fundamental truth too often ignored in policy and practice—workforce outcomes improve when employment is paired with wraparound supports that address housing instability, financial insecurity, trauma, and the lasting consequences of criminal justice involvement. Through programs such as Sweet Beginnings and its broader employment and coaching services, NLEN has shown that fair chance hiring is not merely a moral imperative, but a practical and effective strategy for reducing recidivism, strengthening families, and stabilizing neighborhoods.

As this report makes clear, the costs of failing to invest in such approaches are staggering. Cycles of incarceration extract enormous social

and economic tolls from individuals, families, and communities, while burdening taxpayers with avoidable correctional costs. By contrast, NLEN’s model illustrates how relatively modest investments in community-based employment, social enterprise, and reentry supports can generate outsized returns—reducing reincarceration, increasing earnings, and redirecting public resources toward community assets rather than continued punishment. The data presented here reinforce what practitioners and residents in North Lawndale have long known: when people are given real opportunities to work, heal, and contribute, entire communities benefit, heal, and thrive.

From a funder’s perspective, NLEN exemplifies the kind of organization that long-term, flexible investment is designed to support. Strong community-based organizations (CBOs) do far more than deliver services. They translate policy into practice, adapt to shifting economic conditions, build trust where institutions have historically failed, and enhance individual and community well-being. They also serve as innovation hubs—demonstrating approaches that can be scaled, adapted, and replicated across cities and states. Yet too often, these organizations are asked to do this work with short-term funding, limited administrative support, and narrow definitions of success that undervalue long-term impact.

At the AIR Opportunity Fund, we believe sustained investment in organizations like NLEN is essential

to advancing economic mobility and justice reform. Our support for this work reflects a broader commitment to strengthening the ecosystem of community-based solutions that address the root causes of inequality rather than its symptoms. That means funding not only programs, but also the organizational capacity, evaluation, and learning infrastructure that allow CBOs to grow stronger over time. It also means partnering with organizations as thought leaders—listening to their insights, elevating their evidence, and ensuring that policy discussions are informed by lived experience and community expertise.

This report is itself a product of that kind of partnership. By combining rigorous research from the Great Cities Institute with NLEN's on-the-ground experience, it bridges the gap between data and practice. It reminds us that effective policy does not emerge in isolation, but through collaboration with the communities it is meant to serve. The findings here offer a roadmap for policymakers, funders, and practitioners alike to invest in fair chance employment, support social enterprises, integrate services, and commit to place-based strategies that keep economic value within communities.

Looking ahead, our commitment to NLEN and to organizations like it remains strong. We see this work not as a temporary intervention, but as a core component of a more just and effective economic system. As debates about public safety, workforce development, and criminal justice reform continue, the evidence is

clear—solutions rooted in dignity, opportunity, and community leadership deliver results. Sustaining and scaling those solutions requires continued partnership, trust, and investment.

NLEN's work in North Lawndale offers more than hope; it offers proof. Proof that cycles of incarceration are not inevitable. Proof that employment can be a powerful lever for community transformation. And proof that when funders, researchers, and community organizations work together, we can move from managing consequences to building pathways to prosperity. It is an honor to support this work, and we look forward to continuing this partnership in the years ahead.

Rashawn Ray, Ph.D.,

Vice-President,
American Institutes of Research (AIR)

Executive Director,
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Executive Summary

This updated report, *Drugs, Crimes, and Consequences: Criminal Justice Involvement as a Barrier to Employment and the Significance of Social Enterprises in Fair Chance Hiring*, revisits and expands upon the findings of the original 2002 study titled, *Drugs, Crime, and Consequences: Arrests and Incarceration in North Lawndale*, written by the Center for Impact Research and co-published with the North Lawndale Employment Network.

It shows that more than two decades of continued research and practice in how community-based reentry, workforce development, and justice reform can positively impact recidivism rates. Data was gathered and analyzed by the Great Cities Institute (GCI) at the University of Illinois-Chicago, in conjunction with the North Lawndale Employment Network (NLEN).

The following updates have been made to the 2002 original version:

- Assessing economic and employment trends in North Lawndale from 2000 to 2022.
- Analyzing crime patterns and recidivism rates.
- Evaluating the outcomes and policy significance of NLEN's reentry and employment programs.
- Offering evidence-based policy recommendations.

The report demonstrates the need for new policies and the effectiveness of social enterprises and reentry programs as a strategy for reducing recidivism in our most challenged communities with these key findings:

- **\$1 Billion in Economic Costs from Recidivism:** Illinois spends approximately \$45,000 per inmate per year in correctional costs. Given the 28,715 reoffenders from North Lawndale between 2005 and 2024 (Table 11), the cumulative cost to taxpayers exceeds \$1 billion over two decades.
- **Long-Term Economic Benefits from Social Enterprises and Reentry Programs:** By contrast, community-based employment and reentry programs like NLEN's Sweet Beginnings social enterprise operate at a fraction of this cost while demonstrating *recidivism rates below 10%*. At this rate, for every 10 individuals enrolled as NLEN clients \$405,000 in annual incarceration costs are diverted for Illinois taxpayers. The cost differential provides a compelling fiscal argument for reinvesting in prevention, employment, and reentry services - transforming correctional expenditures into community assets. An important component of social enterprises, also known as social-impact businesses, is that they give back to their community.
- **ROI from North Lawndale Programming/Social Enterprises:** Data show the North Lawndale programs achieved significant return on investment. *Every \$1 invested produced \$5.60 in social change and economic return.* That exceeds the average reentry ROI of \$1 to \$3.

- **Together, Policies and Programs Break the Back-to-Prison Cycle**

- » Recidivism can be lowered in a cost-effective way through a combination of **Fair Chance Hiring** policies and community-based programs that focus on all the needs of individuals reentering their communities.
- » This combination of policies and programs removes barriers to employment, provides job training and housing opportunities, as well as mental health services and more.

Background Rationale: The Impact of U.S. Policies on Illinois, Chicago & North Lawndale

Over the past four decades, criminal justice policies in the United States have fundamentally reshaped the social and economic landscape of many urban communities. The wave of punitive measures enacted during the 1980s and 1990s—including **mandatory minimum sentencing, truth-in-sentencing statutes, and three-strikes laws**—expanded incarceration rates and redefined the relationship between residents, law enforcement, and the broader justice system.

While these policies were designed to deter crime, their long-term effects have been deeply uneven. Disadvantaged urban communities, particularly those of color, experienced **disproportionate incarceration rates** and **widespread economic destabilization**.

Many individuals who had completed their sentences returned to their communities only to be denied jobs and housing because of their criminal records. Their untreated substance abuse and mental health challenges complicated reentry into their communities, which largely were already facing widespread poverty and economic exclusion. With few opportunities for successful reintegration, a high percentage of formerly

incarcerated individuals reoffended. Researchers call this “**prison cycling**”—a recurrent pattern of incarceration and reentry that erodes community stability and limits access to opportunity (Clear & Frost, 2015; Tonry, 2011).

In Illinois, nearly **40% of all individuals released from state prison return to Chicago**, with the majority resettling in neighborhoods located on the **West and South Sides**, where poverty, unemployment, and disinvestment are already entrenched. These communities, including **North Lawndale**, bear the cumulative social and economic weight of mass incarceration - disrupted families, constrained labor markets, and chronic underemployment among returning residents.

Additionally, legal and regulatory barriers imposed after incarceration extend punishment far beyond the completion of a sentence. These include restrictions on professional licensing, student financial aid, voting, and public benefits. While Illinois has made progress in reducing these barriers, more than **1,100 statutes and administrative rules** still impose limits on occupational licensing for people with felony records. Reforming these restrictions remains a key step toward full reintegration.

Illinois Policy Evolution

Illinois has become a national leader over the past decade in criminal justice reform. Policymakers, advocacy organizations, and community-based initiatives, such as NLEN, have contributed to a paradigm shift – moving from punitive approaches to rehabilitative, equity-driven models. These reforms have ranged from decriminalization of marijuana to the elimination of cash bail, expansion of restorative justice courts, and The Fair Chance Act (federal) and Ban the Box laws. Most recently, Governor J.B. Pritzker further strengthened this trajectory by signing the bipartisan Clean Slate Act (HB 1836). This bill automates the sealing of most eligible non-violent records after completion of the sentence and a waiting period. This reconfirms

Illinois's longstanding commitment to Fair chance employment for the one in four adults carrying a record and directly reinforces the employment-focused reentry strategies documented in this report.

These reforms are supported by public opinion: a 2016 Illinois Policy Institute poll found that 83% of respondents agreed that “you can be tough on crime and support reform” (Table 14). Illinois' success reflects a growing national consensus: promoting fair chance employment and reintegration is not only a moral imperative but also a sound economic and public safety strategy.

The North Lawndale Context

Located on Chicago's West Side, North Lawndale is a historically significant community marked by both vibrant civic engagement and enduring structural inequities. Once a manufacturing hub employing tens of thousands in industrial sectors, the neighborhood experienced dramatic economic decline beginning in the mid-20th century as factories closed, businesses disinvested, and jobs relocated to suburban and global markets.

Today, North Lawndale continues to face systemic barriers, including **high poverty rates, limited access to employment, housing instability, and disproportionate justice system involvement**. As of the most recent data, approximately **36% of residents live below the poverty line** (Table 1), and unemployment remains nearly double the citywide average (Table 4).

In North Lawndale, **NLEN saw the causes and effects of prison cycling and responded** with a broad range of resources and wraparound services. NLEN offered programs including job training, financial literacy workshops and access to therapy for mental health and substance-abuse interdiction. NLEN created employment opportunities by opening two social-impact businesses known as social enterprises that hire people who have criminal records. **Sweet Beginnings** and **beelove® café** provide paid transitional jobs, customer-facing experience, and industry-relevant skills to

individuals facing employment barriers. Working with a network of partners including community-focused partners such as the North Lawndale Community Coordinating Council, NLEN's initiatives aim to reduce recidivism and increase economic activity in the community while also serving neighbors' retail needs.

DATA FINDINGS

Further updates of the 2002 version include:

- **North Lawndale's Challenges:** North Lawndale remains significantly more disadvantaged than the city of Chicago as a whole. High poverty, high unemployment, low income and job leakage—residents working outside the neighborhood—limits local economic circulation and weakens community wealth-building.
- **The Impact of Structural Barriers:** Individuals leaving prison find that transitioning to community life is made difficult not just because of their criminal record but also due to structural barriers. These include limited access to employment, housing discrimination, mental health challenges, and the loss of family and community ties. These obstacles prevent successful reintegration, leading to reoffending.
- **Housing Instability:** Stable housing is critical to reentry success, yet individuals with conviction histories often face **blanket housing bans** or are ineligible for public housing assistance. The intersection of poverty, eviction risk, and housing exclusion creates a feedback loop that increases vulnerability to reoffending.
- **Drivers of Recidivism:** In addition to housing instability, trauma and behavioral health challenges are key drivers of recidivism. Over 60% of people returning to Cook County from prison report a mental health or substance use disorder, but fewer than 20% receive treatment in their first year after release.

- **Potential Economic Solutions:** Strengthening place-based hiring, creating career pathways linked to local employers, and expanding community benefits agreements in development projects can reverse this trend and retain economic value within the neighborhood.
- **\$1 Billion in Economic Costs from Recidivism:** Illinois spends approximately \$45,000 per inmate per year in correctional costs. Given the 28,715 reoffenders from North Lawndale between 2005 and 2024 (Table 11), *the cumulative cost to taxpayers exceeds \$1 billion over two decades.*
- **Long Term Economic Benefits from Social Enterprises & Reentry Programs:** By contrast, community-based employment and reentry programs like NLEN's Sweet Beginnings social enterprise operate at a fraction of this cost while demonstrating recidivism rates below 10%. For every 10 individuals enrolled as NLEN clients \$405,000 in annual incarceration costs are diverted for Illinois taxpayers. This cost differential provides a compelling fiscal argument for reinvesting in prevention, employment, and reentry services - transforming correctional expenditures into community assets. An important component of social enterprises, also known as social-impact businesses, is that they give back to their community.
- **ROI from North Lawndale Programming/ Social Enterprises:** Data show the North Lawndale programs achieved significant return on investment. Every \$1 invested produced \$5.60 in social change and economic return. That exceeds the average reentry ROI of \$1 to \$3.
- **Integrated Services Work:** Employment outcomes improve when job placement is paired with counseling, financial literacy, and legal support.
- **Social Enterprises Create Transitional Stability:** Businesses like Sweet Beginnings provide paid training environments that build confidence, skills, and a pathway to employment.
- **Community Ownership Strengthens Accountability:** Locally rooted programs are more responsive and trusted than external interventions.
- **Fair Chance Employment Benefits Everyone:** Reducing recidivism through work lowers taxpayer costs and enhances neighborhood safety.
- **Sustained Funding Is Critical:** Long-term investment—through R3 grants (a landmark program in Illinois that directs 25 percent of state cannabis tax revenue toward communities heavily impacted by violence, poverty, and excessive incarceration), philanthropy, and public contracts—is necessary for continuity and impact.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing on two decades of GCI analysis, the following priorities are identified as central to effective reentry and neighborhood stabilization:

1. Integrate employment, housing, and behavioral health supports.
2. Expand one-stop reentry hubs across Chicago.
3. Reform occupational licensing laws for justice-involved workers.
4. Strengthen pre-release planning in correctional facilities.
5. Diversify agency partnerships with reentry and workforce organizations based on ZIP code.
6. Shift the focus of parole from surveillance to support.
7. Incentivize employer participation via tax credits and bid preferences.
8. Invest in place-based workforce development to reduce job leakage.
9. Expand evaluation systems to measure the impact of policies.
10. Increase social enterprise investments as a pipeline for job training that leads to permanent employment.



REPORT ORGANIZATION

This report begins with an examination of the socio-economic landscape of North Lawndale as well as a snapshot of crime data from three recent periods. Areas covered include income, poverty, employment sectors and educational attainment. This information provides context for understanding violence and involvement in the justice system. A look at recidivism patterns and their underlying factors follows, with details on the methodology used to calculate geographic concentrations of recidivist sentencings. North Lawndale Employment Network's programs and social enterprises are profiled, which then lead into actionable policy recommendations and a summary of Illinois' reentry reforms. The foundation each section provides to the next are critical for understanding the fiscal, social, and moral implications for state and local stakeholders.

A group of appendices wrap up the report, detailing policies in Illinois and Chicago, outlining the evolution of Fair Chance Employment policy frameworks, describing issues related to health access and equity in North Lawndale followed by detailed health data in the community.

CONCLUSION

The report argues that recidivism is not an inevitability but a reflection of the quality and equity of our reentry systems. Effective policy transforms punishment into possibility.

Criminal justice involvement remains a major barrier to employment, perpetuating inequality and community instability. Yet the success of NLEN and statewide reforms shows that fair chance hiring, integrated support, and community partnerships can break this cycle.

Investment in reentry is both a social imperative and an economic strategy. Each individual supported through employment instead of reincarceration saves the state thousands in correctional costs while strengthening families and communities.

The path forward requires scaling what works: models like NLEN, grounded in dignity, data, and collaboration. North Lawndale Employment Network's experience offers a roadmap for equitable growth and safer, more resilient communities statewide.

MORE ABOUT NLEN AND THE UIC GREAT CITIES INSTITUTE

The Role of the North Lawndale Employment Network (NLEN)

The **North Lawndale Employment Network (NLEN)** was founded in 1999, with leadership support from the Steans Family Foundation. NLEN is a community-led response to address fears of gentrification and the need to increase incomes and reduce high local unemployment. NLEN has served 21,150 individuals across all its programs, advancing economic mobility through coaching, credentials, and wraparound support. Participants' recidivism ranged from 4% in 2007-2018 to 6-10% for 2019-current.

NLEN's mission is to create and enhance employment opportunities for individuals who face significant barriers to work - particularly those with criminal records. Its model integrates **job readiness training, financial literacy, transitional employment, and wraparound support services** to help participants secure and maintain meaningful employment.

Through initiatives such as **Sweet Beginnings, U-Turn Permitted, and Path to Prosperity**, NLEN not only equips participants with marketable skills but also promotes community well-being by demonstrating that formerly incarcerated individuals, when provided fair opportunities, become productive and stable members of society.

NLEN currently serves more than **2,000 individuals annually**, providing comprehensive employment services, financial coaching, and social support that strengthen both individuals and families. Its

programs also provide **food vouchers, work attire assistance, and help in obtaining identification**—key tools in overcoming practical barriers to workforce entry. NLEN's Sweet Beginnings program has served 1,800 participants, providing paid transitional jobs, customer-facing experiences and industry-relevant skills training to individuals facing employment barriers.

The Great Cities Institute and Community-Based Policy Research

The **Great Cities Institute (GCI)** at the University of Illinois Chicago serves as an interdisciplinary hub for engaged research, connecting academic expertise to urban challenges. Its mission aligns with the goals of community-based planning and applied policy research: co-producing actionable insights that inform public decision-making, strengthen local economies, and promote social equity.

In collaboration with NLEN and other partners, GCI has documented the evolving dynamics of employment, reentry, and justice reform in North Lawndale for over two decades. This partnership exemplifies “research with consequence”—empirical inquiry conducted not in isolation but in direct service of community transformation.

This report continues that tradition. By linking rigorous data analysis with grounded community practice, it demonstrates how research can inform effective policy and institutional change.

SECTION I: INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT



Chicago, Illinois, USA - March 19, 2011: Bucket boys on Michigan Avenue entertain passersby for tips.

A. Background and Rationale

Over the past four decades, criminal justice policies in the United States have fundamentally reshaped the social and economic landscape of many urban communities. The wave of punitive measures enacted during the 1980s and 1990s — including mandatory minimum sentencing, truth-in-sentencing statutes, and three-strikes laws - expanded incarceration rates and redefined the relationship between residents, law enforcement, and the broader justice system.

While these policies were designed to deter crime, their long-term effects have been deeply uneven. Disadvantaged urban communities, particularly those of color, experienced disproportionate incarceration rates, widespread economic destabilization, and the

emergence of what researchers call “prison cycling” — a recurrent pattern of incarceration and reentry that erodes community stability and limits access to opportunity (Clear & Frost, 2015; Tonry, 2011).

In Illinois, nearly 40% of individuals released from state prison return to Chicago, with the majority resettling in neighborhoods located on the West and South Sides, where poverty, unemployment, and disinvestment are already entrenched. These communities, including North Lawndale, bear the cumulative social and economic weight of mass incarceration — disrupted families, constrained labor markets, and chronic underemployment among returning residents. Lack of resources and limited access to support services further complicate their reintegration into society.

B. The North Lawndale Context

North Lawndale, located on Chicago's West Side, is a historically significant community marked by both vibrant civic engagement and enduring structural inequities. Once a manufacturing hub employing tens of thousands in industrial sectors, the neighborhood experienced dramatic economic decline beginning in the mid-20th century as factories closed, businesses disinvested, and jobs relocated to suburban and global markets. The 2002 study (Drugs, Crime, and Consequences) found that in the prior year nearly a quarter of North Lawndale's population had a new involvement with the criminal justice system. When added to those already experiencing incarceration, parole or probation, the percentage of the community involved in the criminal justice system was up to 57%.

Population decline in North Lawndale over the two decades following that report reflects sustained structural disinvestment, constrained economic opportunity, and weakened neighborhood institutions. From 2000 to 2022, North Lawndale saw a decrease of 27.2% of its population, over four times higher than the rest of the city's 6% decline (Table 17). Nearly half (45.5%) of North Lawndale residents rely on public benefits, far above Chicago's 19.3% (Table 3).

The neighborhood also reflects a disconnect between where residents live and where they work. Only 2.7% of employed North Lawndale residents worked within the neighborhood itself, while 97.3% commute to jobs outside the community (Table 7). Conversely, of the individuals employed in North Lawndale, 92.5% live elsewhere. This "job leakage" limits local economic circulation and weakens community wealth-building.

North Lawndale faces numerous systemic barriers, including high poverty rates, limited access to employment, housing instability, and disproportionate justice system involvement. As of the most recent data, approximately 36% of residents live below the poverty line (Table 1), and unemployment remains nearly double the citywide average (Table 4).

The neighborhood's economic and social conditions are not simply the result of individual disadvantage but the outcome of structural disinvestment and policy neglect. The cumulative impact of redlining, discriminatory hiring practices, and punitive justice systems has compounded exclusion from mainstream economic life. For residents returning from incarceration, these barriers are particularly severe — creating a cycle that links criminal justice involvement, unemployment, and poverty.

C. The Role of the North Lawndale Employment Network (NLEN)

Founded in 1999, the North Lawndale Employment Network (NLEN) emerged as a response to the growing need for inclusive economic opportunity and workforce development tailored to the realities of justice-involved populations. NLEN is a community-led response to address fears of gentrification as well as the need to increase incomes and reduce high unemployment.

NLEN's mission is to create and enhance employment opportunities for individuals who face significant barriers to work - particularly those with criminal records. Its model integrates job readiness training, financial literacy, transitional employment, and wraparound support services to help participants secure and maintain meaningful employment.

Through initiatives such as Sweet Beginnings, U-Turn Permitted, and Path to Prosperity, NLEN not only equips participants with marketable skills but also promotes community well-being by demonstrating that formerly incarcerated individuals, when provided fair opportunities, become productive and stable members of society.

NLEN currently serves more than 2,000 individuals annually, providing comprehensive employment services, financial coaching, and social supports that strengthen both individuals and families. Its programs also provide SNAP assistance, work attire, digital literacy training, credit repaid and building, and help in obtaining identification — key tools in overcoming practical barriers to workforce entry.

D. Purpose and Structure of This Report

This updated report, *Drugs, Crimes, and Consequences: Criminal Justice Involvement as a Barrier to Employment and the Significance of Social Enterprises in Fair Chance Hiring*, revisits and expands upon the findings of the original 2002 study titled, *Drugs, Crime, and Consequences: Arrests and Incarceration in North Lawndale*, written by the Center for Impact Research and co-published with the North Lawndale Employment Network. Report findings reflect over two decades of continued research and practice in community-based reentry, workforce development, and justice reform.

The objectives of this update are fourfold:

1. Assess economic and employment trends in North Lawndale from 2000 to 2022, with special attention to job availability, workforce participation, and income dynamics.
2. Analyze crime patterns and recidivism rates, situating them within the broader context of systemic inequities and local conditions.
3. Evaluate the outcomes and policy significance of NLEN's reentry and employment programs, particularly in the context of Illinois' evolving criminal justice landscape.
4. Offer evidence-based policy recommendations for strengthening fair chance employment, reducing recidivism, and improving the economic resilience of returning residents.

By combining longitudinal data analysis with programmatic evidence, this report underscores the intersection between economic opportunity, public safety, and equity. It demonstrates that sustainable reentry and community revitalization are achievable when employment is coupled with supportive services and inclusive policy frameworks.

E. Illinois Policy Evolution and the Broader Policy Landscape

Over the past decade, Illinois has become a national leader in criminal justice reform. Policymakers, advocacy organizations, and community-based initiatives, such as NLEN, have contributed to a paradigm shift – moving from punitive approaches to rehabilitative, equity-driven models.

Key policy reforms include:

- The decriminalization of marijuana, with portions of tax revenue reinvested in reentry programs and community development
- The elimination of cash bail in Cook County, resulting in reduced pretrial detention for nonviolent offenses
- Expansion of restorative justice courts, offering alternatives to incarceration
- Amendments to the Illinois Human Rights Act (2021) that prohibit employment discrimination based on criminal records unless a substantial relationship to the job exists
- The Fair Chance Act (Federal) and Ban the Box laws that delay background checks until after conditional job offers, encouraging equitable hiring practices.

These reforms are supported by public opinion: a 2016 Illinois Policy Institute poll found that 83% of respondents agreed that “you can be tough on crime and support reform” (Table 14).

Illinois’ success reflects a growing national consensus: promoting fair chance employment and reintegration is not only a moral imperative but also a sound economic and public safety strategy.

F. The Great Cities Institute and Community-Based Policy Research

The Great Cities Institute (GCI) at the University of Illinois Chicago serves as an interdisciplinary hub for engaged research, connecting academic expertise to urban challenges. Its mission aligns with the goals of community-based planning and applied policy research: co-producing actionable insights that inform public decision-making, strengthen local economies, and promote social equity.

In collaboration with NLEN and other partners, GCI has documented the evolving dynamics of employment, reentry, and justice reform in North Lawndale for over two decades. This partnership exemplifies “research with consequence” - empirical inquiry conducted not in isolation but in direct service of community transformation.

This report continues that tradition. By linking rigorous data analysis with grounded community practice, it demonstrates how research can inform effective policy and institutional change.

G. Report Organization

The report proceeds as follows:

- **Section II** examines the socio-economic landscape of North Lawndale as well as crime data from 2001, 2012 & 2023. Tables and analysis here include income, poverty, employment sectors, and educational attainment, supported by longitudinal tables as well as providing context for understanding violence and involvement in the justice system.

- **Section III** examines recidivism patterns and underlying factors.
- **Section IV** profiles NLEN’s programs and social enterprises.
- **Section V** offers actionable policy recommendations and a summary of Illinois’ reentry reforms as well as the implications for state and local stakeholders.
- **Appendix A** describing policies in Illinois and Chicago.
- **Appendix B** outlines the evolution of Fair Chance Employment policy frameworks.
- **Appendix C** describes issues related to health access and equity, includes additional statistics on health disparities, as well as further demographic data on North Lawndale.
- **Appendix D** details health data in North Lawndale.
- **References**



SECTION II: ECONOMIC AND EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS, CRIME AND PUBLIC SAFETY TRENDS IN NORTH LAWNSDALE

A. Overview

North Lawnsdale's economic profile reflects the legacy of historic disinvestment and the cumulative effects of job loss, population decline, and persistent inequality. The area continues to rank among the poorest community areas in Chicago, with residents facing barriers to stable employment, low household incomes, and heavy reliance on public assistance. Despite modest progress in recent years, the data demonstrates the need for targeted, sustained policy interventions related to employment and crime prevention.

North Lawnsdale has a higher unemployment rate compared to other neighborhoods across the city of Chicago. Key challenges, such as limited skill sets, insufficient education, and the stigma associated with criminal backgrounds, contribute to the barriers individuals face in securing employment. Thus, several responses to economic conditions are crucial:

- Establishing effective certification training programs that equip individuals with the essential skills required for today's job market.
- Building partnerships with industry leaders will provide valuable resources and opportunities for job placements.
- Supporting initiatives focused on fostering small business development within North Lawnsdale to create more job opportunities and strengthen the local economy.

Similarly, crime trends in North Lawnsdale reflect the broader structural and economic dynamics shaping the neighborhood. Persistent unemployment,

concentrated poverty, and the lingering impacts of mass incarceration continue to influence community safety.

While the total number of crimes reported in North Lawnsdale has fluctuated since the early 2000s, violent offenses remain disproportionately high compared to citywide averages. This section examines patterns of crime in 2001, 2012, and 2023, highlighting the interplay between enforcement, policy reform, and community conditions.

This data underscores the importance of comprehensive, preventive, and restorative approaches to public safety - those that address not only the symptoms of crime but also the underlying social and economic causes.

B. Poverty Trends

Poverty rates in North Lawnsdale have remained persistently high across decades, even as citywide poverty has declined. In 2000, 38.9% of residents lived below the poverty line - already double the city rate. By the 2008 - 2012 period, that figure had increased to 43.9%. The most recent data from 2018 - 2022 show improvement, with poverty decreasing to 35.9%. However, this remains more than twice Chicago's citywide average of 16.9%.

Persistent poverty in North Lawnsdale underscores the continuing impact of structural inequities such as disinvestment, limited access to quality education, and labor market exclusion. Targeted workforce development programs and equitable hiring policies remain essential for reducing poverty and promoting economic resilience.

Table 1: Poverty Rate in North Lawndale compared to Chicago, 2000, 2008-2012, and 2018-2022

Geography	2000	2008-2012	2018-2022
North Lawndale	38.9%	43.9%	35.9%
Chicago	19.2%	22.1%	16.9%

Data Source: Census Bureau (2000 Decennial Census, 2008-2012, and 2018-2022, American Community Survey 5-year Estimates). Tabulations by Great Cities Institute.

C. Median Household Income

Median household income remains a critical indicator of neighborhood well-being. As Table 2 shows, North Lawndale's median household income has remained substantially below Chicago's for over two decades. In 2000, the median income in North Lawndale was \$21,518 compared to \$38,625 citywide. Between 2018 and 2022, the median household income in North Lawndale rose to \$34,042; however, it remains less than half of Chicago's median income of \$71,673.

This persistent income disparity highlights the structural challenges that inhibit wealth accumulation and social mobility. Income stagnation limits local purchasing power, constrains small business growth, and reinforces cycles of dependence on public support.

Table 2: Median Household Income in North Lawndale compared to Chicago, 2000, 2008-2012, and 2018-2022

Geography	2000	2008-2012	2018-2022
North Lawndale	\$21,518	\$22,714	\$34,042
Chicago	\$38,625	\$47,408	\$71,673

Data Source: Census Bureau (2000 Decennial Census, 2008-2012, and 2018-2022, American Community Survey 5-year Estimates). Tabulations by Great Cities Institute. Dollar figures in nominal dollars.

D. Public Assistance Utilization

Public assistance programs such as income support and SNAP benefits serve as vital safety nets for North Lawndale residents. However, their high rates of utilization underscore the fragility of the local economy.

Between 2008 and 2012, nearly half (49.2%) of households received public assistance, compared to only 17.9% citywide. Although the percentage declined slightly to 45.5% by 2018 - 2022, it remains more than twice the Chicago average of 19.3%.

These figures demonstrate how social safety nets buffer the burden of systemic economic exclusion, emphasizing the need for policies that expand access to quality employment and strengthen pathways to financial independence.

Table 3: Percent of Households Utilizing Public Benefits in North Lawndale compared to Chicago, 2008-2012, and 2018-2022

Geography	2008-2012	2018-2022
North Lawndale	49.2%	45.5%
Chicago	17.9%	19.3%

^aPublic Assistance Income or Food Stamps/SNAP in the Past 12 Months for Households.

^bSource: American Community Survey 5-year Estimates (2008-2012, 2018-2022). Tabulations by Great Cities Institute.

E. Employment Status and Unemployment Trends

Unemployment in North Lawndale has historically exceeded the city's average. In 2000, 22.1% of residents were unemployed, compared to 10.1% citywide. While the unemployment rate fell to 15.7% between 2018 and 2022, this remains nearly double Chicago's 8.3%.

This persistent employment gap reflects both structural barriers and stigma related to justice system involvement. As the Great Cities Institute's reentry research demonstrates, stable employment is one of the most effective deterrents to recidivism, yet those with conviction histories face systemic exclusion. Strengthening reentry employment pipelines and employer incentives remains a top policy priority.

Table 4: Unemployment Rate in North Lawndale compared to Chicago, 2000, 2008-2012, and 2018-2022

Geography	2000	2008-2012	2018-2022
North Lawndale	22.1%	21.2%	15.7%
Chicago	10.1%	13.0%	8.3%

Data Source: Census Bureau (2000 Decennial Census, 2008-2012, and 2018-2022, American Community Survey 5-year Estimates). Tabulations by Great Cities Institute.

F. Employment by Industry

The industrial composition of North Lawndale's economy has undergone a dramatic shift over the past two decades. Once dominated by manufacturing and trade, the neighborhood's employment base has transitioned toward service-oriented sectors.

In 2002, manufacturing accounted for 28.2% of local employment, followed by wholesale trade (21.5%) and healthcare/social assistance (20.7%). By 2021, healthcare and social assistance had grown to 32.8%, while manufacturing had declined to 17.1%, and educational services had risen to 14.5%.

This shift reflects both structural changes in the city's labor market and the neighborhood's adaptation to sectors driven by service and nonprofit employment. However, it also underscores the need for new investments in middle-skill industries and equitable access to jobs offering family-sustaining wages.

Table 5: Employment in North Lawndale (2002, 2012, 2021)

Rank	Industry	Number	Percent
2002			
1	Manufacturing	2,365	28.2%
2	Wholesale Trade	1,803	21.5%
3	Health Care and Social Assistance	1,739	20.7%
4	Retail Trade	789	9.4%
5	Transportation and Warehousing	402	4.8%
2012			
1	Health Care and Social Assistance	1,718	28.2%
2	Manufacturing	1,313	21.6%
3	Retail Trade	730	12.0%
4	Wholesale Trade	484	7.9%
5	Educational Services	453	7.4%
2021			
1	Health Care and Social Assistance	2,615	32.8%
2	Manufacturing	1,364	17.1%
3	Educational Services	1,151	14.5%
4	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	614	7.7%
5	Retail Trade	370	4.6%

Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics program (2002, 2012, 2021). Tabulations by Great Cities Institute.

G. Employment of North Lawndale Residents

North Lawndale residents are increasingly employed in health care, administrative services, and retail sectors. However, the types of jobs held by residents differ significantly from those available within the neighborhood.

As shown in Table 6, the healthcare and social assistance sector has consistently employed roughly one-fifth of residents (20.4%–21.4%) over the past two decades, while manufacturing and retail have declined. Administrative and support services have grown, now employing 12.2% of residents.

This concentration in low-wage, service-oriented employment highlights ongoing labor segmentation, suggesting that local residents remain excluded from higher-wage sectors despite proximity to employment centers.

Table 6: Employment of North Lawndale residents (2002, 2012, 2021)

Rank	Industry	Number	Percent
2002			
1	Health Care and Social Assistance	2,045	20.4%
2	Manufacturing	1,098	10.9%
3	Retail Trade	1,091	10.9%
4	Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	975	9.7%
5	Accommodation and Food Services	936	9.3%
2012			
1	Health Care and Social Assistance	2,045	20.4%

Rank	Industry	Number	Percent
2	Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	1,098	10.9%
3	Retail Trade	1,091	10.9%
4	Transportation and Warehousing	975	9.7%
5	Accommodation and Food Services	936	9.3%
2021			
1	Health Care and Social Assistance	2,305	21.4%
2	Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	1,312	12.2%
3	Retail Trade	1,149	10.7%
4	Transportation and Warehousing Services	880	8.2%
5	Accommodation and Food Services	843	7.8%

Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics program (2002, 2012, 2021). Tabulations by Great Cities Institute.

H. Employment Locations and Job Leakage

A striking feature of North Lawndale's economic landscape is the disconnection between where residents live and where they work. Despite the presence of employment opportunities in the area, particularly in healthcare, education, and light manufacturing, very few residents are employed locally.

In 2021, only 2.7% of employed North Lawndale residents worked within the neighborhood itself, while 97.3% commuted to jobs outside the community. Conversely, of the 15,751 individuals



employed in North Lawndale, 92.5% lived elsewhere.

This employment-residence mismatch, often referred to as “job leakage”, limits local economic circulation and weakens community wealth-building. Policies that promote local hiring preferences, anchor-institution partnerships, and workforce development pipelines connected to neighborhood employers are essential to close this gap.

This geographic separation of employment and residence means that local economic activity does not benefit North Lawndale households proportionally. Strengthening place-based hiring, creating career pathways linked to local employers, and expanding community benefits agreements in development projects can reverse this trend and retain economic value within the neighborhood.

Table 7: Top Employment Locations of North Lawndale Residents (2002, 2012, 2021)

Location	2002	2012	2021
Outside of Chicago	5,076 (41.0%)	3,420 (34.2%)	4,122 (39.1%)
Loop	1,570 (12.7%)	1,664 (16.6%)	1,585 (15.0%)
Near West Side	781 (6.3%)	712 (7.1%)	838 (8.0%)
Near North Side	586 (4.7%)	674 (6.7%)	612 (5.8%)
North Lawndale	394 (3.2%)	388 (3.9%)	289 (2.7%)

Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics program (2002, 2012, 2021). Tabulations by Great Cities Institute.

I. Crime Profile: 2001

In 2001, battery and narcotics-related offenses were the two most prevalent categories of crime in North Lawndale, accounting for over half of all reported incidents.

Battery made up 28.8% of all recorded offenses, followed by narcotics violations (22.6%) and theft (14.9%) (see Table 8). The prominence of drug-related arrests reflected the heightened enforcement environment of the early 2000s, driven by federal and local “War on Drugs” initiatives.

These enforcement strategies disproportionately affected Black and Latino communities, producing high rates of incarceration for nonviolent offenses - a pattern that would later catalyze policy reform efforts aimed at decriminalization and diversion.

Table 8: Reported Incidents of Crime in North Lawndale Compared to Chicago, 2001

Crime	North Lawndale		Chicago	
	Total Count	% of Total	Total Count	% of Total
Damage to Persons				
Battery	2,969	28.8%	92,988	23.1%
Assault	844	8.2%	31,260	7.8%
Harassment Electronic or Telephone	159	1.5%	8,736	2.2%
Homicide	22	0.2%	666	0.2%
Domestic Battery	4	0%	124	0%
Property				
Theft	1,537	14.9%	98,447	24.5%
Burglary	437	4.2%	25,943	6.4%
Auto Theft	448	4.3%	20,500	5.1%
Robbery	521	5.1%	18,292	4.5%
ID theft	2	0%	62	0%
Vandalism				
Criminal Damage (Property or Car)	1,044	10.1%	54,931	13.7%
Narcotics				
Narcotics	2,327	22.6%	50,318	12.5%
Total	10,314	100%	402,267	100%

Source: City of Chicago Data Portal 2001 Crimes. Tabulations by Great Cities Institute.

The concentration of narcotics arrests during this period was linked to aggressive policing strategies that criminalized substance use rather than addressing it as a public health issue. The long-term consequences of these policies included disproportionate incarceration, family separation, and deepened mistrust between residents and law enforcement.

J. Crime Profile: 2012

By 2012, the composition of crime in North Lawndale had shifted. Domestic battery and narcotics offenses remained leading categories, each representing about 23% of total reported crimes.

This period coincided with the early implementation of state-level sentencing reforms and community-based initiatives aimed at preventing violence. While these measures began to moderate some enforcement patterns, drug-related arrests continued to constitute a significant portion of local law enforcement activity.

Table 9: Reported Incidents of Crime in North Lawndale compared to Chicago, 2012

Crime	North Lawndale		Chicago	
	Total Count	% of Total	Total Count	% of Total
Damage to Persons				
Domestic Battery	2,362	23%	57,490	18.6%
Battery	1,116	10.8%	30,377	9.8%
Assault	654	6.4%	19,894	6.4%
Harassment Electronic or Telephone	123	1.2%	5,768	1.9%
Homicide	19	0.2%	515	0.2%
Property				
Theft	1,394	13.5%	75,441	24.4%
Burglary	532	5.2%	22,832	7.4%
Auto Theft	294	2.9%	14,129	4.6%
Robbery	446	4.3%	13,471	4.4%
ID theft	17	0.2%	425	0.1%
Vandalism				
Criminal Damage (Property or Car)	959	9.3%	33,005	10.7%
Firearm Violations				
Illegal Firearm Discharge	3	0%	97	0%
Narcotics				
Narcotics	2,369	23%	35,470	11.5%
Total	10,288	100%	308,914	100%

Source: City of Chicago Data Portal 2012 Crimes. Tabulations by Great Cities Institute.

The persistent prevalence of domestic violence and narcotics-related incidents indicates continuing social distress and systemic enforcement challenges.

K. Crime Profile: 2023

By 2023, North Lawndale's crime landscape had evolved further. Domestic battery remained the most reported crime, comprising 22.3% of total incidents, followed by theft (12.7%) and battery (11.7%).

Notably, narcotics offenses declined substantially to just 7.1% of reported crimes - reflecting statewide

decriminalization efforts, shifting enforcement priorities, and greater emphasis on diversion and treatment.

Despite this progress, violent crime, particularly gun violence, continues to pose significant challenges. Community-based organizations, such as the Institute for Nonviolence Chicago, have emerged as vital partners in addressing the root causes of violence through employment, cognitive behavioral therapy, and trauma-informed interventions.

Table 10: Reported Incidents of Crime in North Lawndale Compared to Chicago, 2023

Crime	North Lawndale		Chicago	
	Total Count	% of Total	Total Count	% of Total
Damage to Persons				
Domestic Battery	1,548	22.3%	39,666	16.2%
Battery	813	11.7%	24,355	9.9%
Assault	685	9.9%	22,609	9.2%
Harassment Electronic or Telephone	112	1.6%	5,045	2.1%
Homicide	27	0.4%	627	0.3%
Property				
Theft	880	12.7%	57,405	23.4%
Auto Theft	654	9.4%	28,584	11.7%
Robbery	293	4.2%	11,052	4.5%
Burglary	119	1.7%	7,480	3.1%
ID theft	105	1.5%	5,886	2.4%
Vandalism				
Criminal Damage (Property or Car)	842	12.1%	29,232	11.9%
Firearm Violations				
Unlawful Handgun Possession	288	4.1%	5,114	2.1%
Illegal Firearm Discharge	90	1.3%	2,582	1.1%
Narcotics				
Narcotics	496	7.1%	5,233	2.1%
Total	6,952	100%	244,898	100%

Source: City of Chicago Data Portal 2023 Crimes. Tabulations by Great Cities Institute.

L. Comparative Analysis and Implications

From 2001 to 2023, the total number of reported crimes in North Lawndale fell by more than 40%, indicating progress toward stabilization. However, the persistence of violent crime and domestic battery highlights the enduring effects of social dislocation and economic precarity.

The decline in narcotics offenses - from 22.6% of total crimes in 2001 to just 7.1% in 2023 -marks a major policy success linked to the decriminalization of cannabis, the adoption of diversion programs, and the reorientation of enforcement priorities toward community safety rather than punitive drug policing.

Nevertheless, high rates of domestic violence, property crime, and gun-related incidents underscore the need for sustained, integrated approaches that connect violence prevention, employment, and mental health support.

Investments in violence interruption, reentry employment, and youth engagement programs have demonstrated measurable reductions in recidivism and victimization rates. Policymakers should continue to expand these models as evidence-based strategies for urban safety and community well-being.



SECTION III: RECIDIVISM AND BARRIERS TO REENTRY

Upon reintegrating into society, individuals frequently encounter significant obstacles in adjusting to daily life. Reconnecting with family members can prove challenging and may contribute to feelings of isolation and distress. Securing stable employment often proves to be a formidable challenge. Employment stability is crucial for fostering financial independence and establishing a sense of purpose; however, without it, the likelihood of reverting to criminal behavior may increase. Employment-focused reentry programs play a vital role in addressing these challenges. Such programs are specifically designed to equip individuals with the requisite skills necessary for successful job searching, including conducting resume workshops, providing interview preparation, and facilitating connections to prospective employers.

While obtaining employment is a critical step towards rehabilitation, it is equally important to recognize that sustained success entails more than merely securing a job. Many individuals may require ongoing support, including counseling, mentorship, and access to community resources, to address underlying issues that could lead to recidivism.

North Lawndale's economic disparities remain entrenched over the quarter-century when compared to trends within the broader City of Chicago. These structural inequalities and socio-economic conditions also collectively contribute to the difficulties faced by ex-offenders in reintegrating into the workforce. Neighborhoods that absorb previously incarcerated residents without adequate comprehensive assistance in the form of job readiness training, mentorship and support services can only expect recidivism as an outcome.

Organizations such as NLEN are committed to reducing recidivism through comprehensive programs and services designed to facilitate the

effective reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals into their communities. These initiatives not only empower individuals to overcome their past but also contribute to the development of stronger, safer neighborhoods. Breaking the cycle of crime and incarceration is imperative for the millions of individuals who reenter society each year, as it provides them with opportunities to forge new paths, make meaningful contributions to their communities, and ultimately create a positive future for themselves and their families. Investing in their successful reintegration is both a benefit to the individuals involved and an investment in the overall health and safety of society.

This section connects the quantitative findings on recidivism to the structural barriers that perpetuate reentry failure and community destabilization, and it introduces the rationale for fair-chance employment and reentry investment.

A. Overview & Methodology

Recidivism - the tendency of individuals released from incarceration to reoffend - represents one of the most persistent challenges in North Lawndale's community landscape. For policymakers and practitioners alike, understanding the drivers of recidivism is crucial to designing effective interventions that reduce crime, support reentry, and promote public safety.

Many recidivism calculations determine the percentage of individuals who re-offend within a specific period (3-years, 5-years). An Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) document from 2022 looks at 3-year recidivism rates for individuals in each of FY14-FY19, calculating rates from 36.7-43.0% for each fiscal year. What this report does differently is to study the geographic concentration of recidivist admissions over an extended period, identifying that high rates are endemic and need targeted treatments to break incarceration cycles.

The IDOC publishes prison population data sets with unique identifiers for all admitted individuals along with their current admission date, holding offense, and other various data points. These files were published annually in 2005, semi-annually for 2006-2017, and are updated quarterly for all years following 2018. Through a FOIA request, GCI obtained the ZIP Code of origin for all admitted individuals for all fiscal years (July – June) from July 2005 – June 2024. After combining prison population files and filtering unique individual & current admission dates, then appending origin ZIP Codes where available, we have a dataset of 290,626 unique admission records along with their sentencing information. All admissions are labeled with a type (court admissions, direct from court, transferred from juvenile, discharged & recommitted, parole violation, etc.). By cataloging types as either recidivist or non-recidivist, calculations can be made on the volume of admissions that are recidivist in nature by geographic area in Illinois.

Between 2005 and 2024, analysis of IDOC data shows that 31,203 individuals from North Lawndale were admitted to prison (represented by ZIP Codes 60623, 60624 & 60608). Of these admissions from North Lawndale, 28,715 - an estimated 92.03% - were re-incarcerated under a recidivist admittance type (parole violation, re-offense, etc.). This rate is among the highest for any Chicago community area and underscores the cyclical relationship between incarceration, unemployment, and poverty.

The statewide rate over this period was 77%. Other West Side or Chicago ZIP Codes have similarly high rates of recidivism admission types (several ZIP Codes exceed 85%), as do other cities across the state (Rockford's 61101 is 88%).

An additional FOIA request was made on exit ZIP Codes for all released individuals. The person-level data was found to be less reliable for an in depth analysis of this magnitude, however the data did reveal that 39.2% of individuals are released to ZIPs in Chicago.

Table 11: Recidivism Rate in North Lawndale, 2005-2024

Metric	North Lawndale	Chicago	Illinois
Recidivist Sentencings	28,715	55,106	122,341
Unique Individuals Sentenced	31,203	63,675	159,351
Recidivism Rate	92.03%	86.54%	76.77%

^a Data Source: Illinois Department of Corrections 2005-2024. Tabulations by Great Cities Institute.

These figures reveal not an individual moral failure but a systemic one. Without stable employment, housing, or access to mental health care, returning citizens face overwhelming structural barriers to reintegration.

B. Recidivism by ZIP Code (High Concentration)

Analyzing recidivism data at the ZIP Code level allows for a stronger comparison between portions of the state, however it also highlights some inconsistencies in the dataset over time. The Department of Corrections made changes to their system of record at the end of 2015. Prior to this change the high volume of individuals within origin ZIP Codes that coincided with correctional center locations had led to some level of “Institution ZIP Contamination”. Individuals, when admitted, were either self-reporting their ZIP of origin or the correctional officers were listing the facility location as their site of origin. Instances of this appear to reduce significantly in years after 2015. Further investigation and analysis around both ZIP Code of Origin and Exit ZIP Code may be warranted in future reporting in order to ascertain the full impact of nearby correctional centers and potential changes in data trends following IDOC reporting adjustments.

Institution ZIP Contamination is clearly represented in Table 12 below, however it alone does not account for the high levels of recidivism concentrated in these 25 ZIP Codes. The areas shown have the highest percentage of recidivist admissions in ZIPs with 750+ admissions over the 2005-2024

period. This collection illustrates the geographically concentrated repetitive involvement of individuals in the justice system when holistic interventions and support services are not present throughout much of the state.

Table 12: Highest ZIP Recidivism Rate, Areas With 750+ Admissions, 2005-2024

ZIP Code	City	Recidivism Rate
62846	Ina	98.7%
61021	Dixon	94.7%
62995	Vienna	93.5%
60608	Chicago (North Lawndale, Lower West Side)	93.3%
62049	Hillsboro	92.1%
62568	Taylorville	90.8%
60607	Chicago (Near West Side)	90.0%
61520	Canton	89.0%
61101	Rockford	88.4%
60615	Chicago (Kenwood, Hyde Park)	88.1%
62454	Robinson	87.7%
61401	Galesburg	86.9%
60624	Chicago (Garfield Park, North Lawndale)	86.8%

ZIP Code	City	Recidivism Rate
60612	Chicago (Near West Side)	86.4%
60644	Chicago (Austin)	86.0%
60436	Joliet	85.9%
61801	Urbana	85.4%
60085	Waukegan	85.3%
60187	Wheaton	85.3%
60651	Chicago (Humboldt Park)	85.2%
60153	Maywood	85.0%
60647	Chicago (Logan Square)	84.9%
62656	Lincoln	84.5%
60623	Chicago (North Lawndale)	84.5%
60621	Chicago (Englewood)	84.3%

^a Data Source: Illinois Department of Corrections 2005-2024. Tabulations by Great Cities Institute.

D. Recidivism by Offense Type

Analysis of repeat offenses over the 19-year period (2005–2024) reveals patterns consistent with socioeconomic vulnerability and limited opportunity. Drug possession and manufacture of controlled substances remain the most common charge among repeat offenders, followed by property crimes and weapons violations.

This distribution reflects both the enforcement priorities of the criminal justice system and the scarcity of pathways for sustainable reentry. It also illustrates how punitive drug policies and employment discrimination perpetuate cycles of incarceration.

Table 13: Recidivism Patterns among North Lawndale Residents Released from IDOC (2005–2024)

Offense Category	Percent of Total Reoffenders
Possession of Controlled Substance	21.3%
Manufacture/Delivery of Controlled Substance	15.5%
Burglary	10.8%
Unlawful Use or Possession of a Weapon by Felon	10.4%
Theft	9.5%
Robbery	8.0%
Motor Vehicle Theft	3.3%
Other Offenses	21.3%
Total Reoffenders	100.0%

Data Source: Illinois Department of Corrections (2005–2024). Tabulations by Great Cities Institute.

The concentration of drug-related re-offenses—over one-third of all recidivism—indicates a policy environment that has historically criminalized addiction and poverty. The rise in weapons-related charges also reflects the spillover of gun availability and community trauma in disinvested areas.

E. Structural Barriers to Successful Reentry

For individuals leaving prison, the transition to community life is fraught with barriers that extend far beyond the criminal record itself. These include limited access to employment, housing discrimination, mental health challenges, and the loss of family and community ties.

1. Employment and Economic Exclusion

Employment remains the single most important predictor of successful reentry. Yet studies consistently show that formerly incarcerated individuals face unemployment rates exceeding 25% in the year following release - higher than any other demographic group in the U.S. labor market.

In North Lawndale, this challenge is exacerbated by already high neighborhood unemployment rates (15.7% from 2018 to 2022) and limited local hiring opportunities (Tables 4 and 7). Many employers still disqualify applicants with criminal records, despite evidence that returning citizens are no more likely to be terminated for misconduct than other employees (Agan & Starr, 2018).

2. Housing Instability

Stable housing is critical to reentry success, yet individuals with conviction histories often face blanket housing bans or are ineligible for public housing assistance. The intersection of poverty,

eviction risk, and housing exclusion creates a feedback loop that increases vulnerability to reoffending.

3. Behavioral Health and Trauma

A significant proportion of returning citizens experience untreated mental health issues and trauma. The absence of accessible counseling, substance use treatment, and trauma-informed services contributes directly to relapse and reincarceration.

The Illinois Justice Project (2022) found that over 60% of people returning to Cook County from prison report a mental health or substance use disorder, but fewer than 20% receive treatment in their first year after release.

4. Policy Disincentives and Administrative Barriers

Collateral consequences - legal and regulatory barriers imposed after incarceration - extend punishment far beyond the completion of a sentence. These include restrictions on professional licensing, student financial aid, voting, and public benefits.

While Illinois has made progress in reducing these barriers, more than 1,100 statutes and administrative rules still impose limits on occupational licensing for people with felony records. Reforming these restrictions remains a key step toward full reintegration.

F. Social and Community Consequences

High recidivism rates have community-level consequences that ripple across generations. Families absorb the emotional and financial costs of incarceration, while local economies lose income, productivity, and stability. Children of incarcerated parents face increased risks of academic failure, poverty, and contact with the criminal justice system themselves.

In North Lawndale, where nearly one in three adults has a criminal record, incarceration has become a defining feature of community life. This normalization of imprisonment erodes civic

participation, undermines trust in institutions, and reinforces patterns of disenfranchisement.

G. Economic Costs of Recidivism

The fiscal burden of reincarceration is staggering. Illinois spends approximately \$45,000 per inmate per year in correctional costs. Given the 28,715 reoffenders from North Lawndale between 2005 and 2024, the cumulative cost to taxpayers exceeds \$1 billion over two decades. By contrast, NLEN estimates that their costs per client range from \$9,000 to \$14,000 depending on age, prior skills and certifications.

Community-based employment and reentry programs like NLEN's Sweet Beginnings social enterprise operate at a fraction of the cost of incarceration while demonstrating recidivism rates below 10%.

This cost differential provides a compelling fiscal argument for reinvesting in prevention, employment, and reentry services—transforming correctional expenditures into community assets.

SECTION IV: THE NLEN MODEL—A COMMUNITY-BASED FRAMEWORK FOR RE-INTEGRATION



Individuals caring for urban bee farms gain meaningful job experience while contributing to sustainable businesses.

Established in 1999, NLEN has worked with over 21,150 individuals across their wide range of programs. Clients benefit from a combination of classroom instruction that equips them with essential skills, complemented by hands-on training experiences that prepare them for the workforce. Job placement opportunities are made available through key partnerships with organizations like the Chicago Transit Authority and through NLEN's own initiative, Sweet Beginnings. This innovative

social enterprise features an urban bee farm that produces a range of honey-infused skincare products branded under the beelove® name. Sweet Beginnings alone has served 1,800 participants, providing paid transitional jobs, customer-facing experience, and industry-relevant skills to overcome employment barriers. Through these efforts, NLEN aims to foster individuals to achieve personal success while promoting community development and economic revitalization in North Lawndale.

The community-centered model exemplified by the NLEN has led to significant improvements in employment outcomes and reduced recidivism rates among formerly incarcerated individuals. Data show that only 4% of clients who worked at NLEN's social enterprise, Sweet Beginnings, returned to prison between 2007-2018. In comparison, Illinois has a statewide recidivism rate of 77%. These findings highlight the effectiveness of community-focused interventions in facilitating successful reintegration and lowering recidivism rates for formerly incarcerated individuals. More importantly, NLEN's employment initiatives benefit both returning citizens and the broader North Lawndale community, which gains significantly from the successful reintegration of these individuals into the workforce.

Studies indicate that securing paid employment for a period of six months to a year in a supportive work setting significantly benefits individuals who have faced difficulties securing and maintaining jobs. This experience not only fosters long-term job retention but also often results in a gradual increase in income over time. When this employment is combined with comprehensive support services, it can lead to a noticeable improvement in job skills for those who encounter obstacles to employment. Strengthening these skills can open doors to greater economic opportunities and better equip individuals for successful, long-term employment. Additionally, jobs and support services should focus on providing stability for those facing significant challenges in finding meaningful work.

The average wage of NLEN clients enrolled in workforce programs for FY24 was 16.6% higher than Chicago's minimum wage. Industry placements for this same period were Production (38%), Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance (25%), Food Preparation and Serving Related (24%), and Transportation and Material Moving (13%).

This section emphasizes the model's measurable outcomes, scalability, and policy relevance as an evidence-based approach to reducing recidivism and improving community well-being.

A. Overview and Mission

NLEN was founded in 1999 with a mission to create and enhance employment opportunities for individuals who face significant barriers to work, particularly those with criminal records. Based in the heart of Chicago's West Side, NLEN has evolved into a nationally recognized model of community-based reentry and workforce development.

Its programs are grounded in the principle that employment is both a pathway to self-sufficiency and a cornerstone of public safety. NLEN addresses not only the immediate need for jobs but also the structural and behavioral barriers that prevent sustained economic participation.

B. Theory of Change

NLEN's approach is guided by a "workforce ecosystem" theory of change, which integrates three interdependent strategies:

5. **Personal Transformation:** Empowering individuals to rebuild confidence and self-efficacy through counseling, coaching, and cognitive-behavioral support.
6. **Economic Opportunity:** Connecting participants to fair-wage employment, vocational training, and entrepreneurship opportunities.
7. **Community Impact:** Strengthening families, local businesses, and civic life through stable employment and social reintegration.

This model acknowledges that employment success necessitates addressing both individual-level challenges (such as trauma, literacy, and financial instability) and systemic barriers (including discrimination and limited access to capital) that shape reentry outcomes.

C. Core Programs and Services

NLEN's portfolio of programs spans the full spectrum of workforce development - from pre-employment preparation to long-term career advancement. Each initiative is designed to meet participants where they are, providing both immediate job placement and long-term capacity-building.

1. U-Turn Permitted

The U-Turn Permitted, NLEN's job readiness program, assists returning citizens who often face challenges in securing sustainable employment and reconnecting with their families during their reintegration into their communities by equipping them with essential employment skills. This program offers vocational training and cognitive reframing, grounded in principles of cognitive-behavioral therapy. U-Turn Permitted focuses on restoring participant self-worth, empowerment, and reclaiming their voice. Participants with felony convictions are required to complete training in anger management, basic computer skills, resume writing, and job interview preparation. Successful graduates can pursue employment at Sweet Beginnings, where they acquire valuable technical and soft skills needed in today's job market.

A flagship program focused on individuals returning from incarceration.

- Provides job readiness training, financial literacy workshops, and coaching.
- Incorporates cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) to address trauma and support behavior change.
- Offers employment placement and post-placement coaching for retention.

Participants complete an intensive, cohort-based curriculum that emphasizes emotional regulation, workplace communication, and rebuilding self-worth after incarceration.

2. Path to Prosperity

This program is a streamlined version of the U-Turn Permitted program, targeting individuals without a criminal record who face employment barriers. The

program aims to facilitate access to job opportunities by addressing the systemic challenges that hinder these individuals from entering the workforce.

Targets unemployed or underemployed residents of North Lawndale who may not have criminal records but face economic hardship.

- Focuses on career pathway navigation, resume development, and digital literacy.
- Connects participants to local employers and training providers.
- Promotes economic mobility through goal setting and savings programs.

3. Craft Your Path

A key initiative, the Craft Your Path program is a youth-focused initiative that serves as a pre-employment intervention, offering at-risk young adults the tools and support they need to forge sustainable career paths at an early stage in their lives. It serves individuals aged 16–24, including those involved in the justice system.

- Combines career exploration, life skills education, and paid internships
- Engages young people in civic leadership and personal development
- Provides mentoring and pathways to postsecondary education or apprenticeships

4. Social Enterprises

Social enterprises offer job opportunities and skill development to individuals facing barriers to employment by directly hiring them. They offer on-the-job training that aids their transition into unsubsidized jobs. These enterprises primarily focus on low-income individuals confronting challenges such as involvement with the criminal justice system, mental illness, substance abuse, homelessness, and youth who are neither enrolled in school nor engaged in the workforce. Beyond employment, social enterprises provide essential resources such as transportation assistance, access to healthcare services, housing support, and clothing provisions. In addition, they offer treatment services for mental health challenges and substance use disorders.



Employees at NLEN's beelove® café gain skills in customer service, hospitality, and entrepreneurship.

This comprehensive support empowers individuals to secure meaningful employment, promoting long-term stability and success that yields positive outcomes for both participants and the broader community.

To promote job creation and increase community wealth, NLEN has established two significant social enterprises: Sweet Beginnings, which specializes in producing high-quality honey and honey-infused products, and beelove® café, which offers a welcoming space where residents can enjoy a range of coffee and food options while connecting with one another. These social enterprises serve as essential platforms that encourage community involvement and actively support local food and beverage entrepreneurs. Through these initiatives, NLEN seeks to drive economic growth,

strengthen social ties, foster a vibrant and resilient community, and reinforce the importance of local entrepreneurship in North Lawndale.

Sweet Beginnings operates three urban apiaries, or bee farms, producing honey and honey-infused skincare products marketed under the beelove® brand. The program provides participants with invaluable training and skills, with a significant majority of its graduates successfully securing meaningful employment. Notably, only 8% of participants re-offend, reflecting a remarkably low recidivism rate. In comparison, data from the Illinois Department of Corrections indicate a substantially higher three-year recidivism rate, exceeding 36%. This data underscores the effectiveness of the Sweet Beginnings program in promoting rehabilitation and contributing to societal reintegration.

a. Sweet Beginnings, LLC

A nationally acclaimed social enterprise founded by NLEN to provide transitional employment opportunities to returning citizens.

- Operates an urban bee farm that produces beelove® honey and honey-based skincare products.
- Products are sold online and through retailers across the Chicagoland region.
- Serves as a low-barrier entry point for participants with limited work experience.
- Provides hands-on training in production, marketing, and distribution through an Earn and Learn model.

Sweet Beginnings has achieved extraordinary results: participants have a recidivism rate between 4% and 10%, compared to the statewide average of 77% (Illinois Department of Corrections, 2023).

b. beelove® café

Building on the success of Sweet Beginnings, NLEN launched the beelove® café, a workforce and hospitality training enterprise with an emphasis on creating local jobs for local residents..

- Offers employment opportunities to individuals completing job readiness programs.
- Integrates culinary training, customer service skills, and entrepreneurship.
- Serves as a community gathering space, reinforcing NLEN's visibility and mission.

5. Transitional Jobs Program

NLEN's transitional jobs program offers valuable assistance to some of the most disadvantaged individuals facing significant challenges, including those who have been formerly incarcerated, and others burdened by substantial barriers to employment, such as limited education or lack of work experience. This program pays participants minimum wage and helps them develop valuable skills in beekeeping, inventory management, online order processing, customer relations, and acquire

expertise in making "beelove®" bee products. Additionally, participants can earn certifications in food safety management, forklift operation, and advanced proficiency in Microsoft Office applications.

6. Subsidized Employment

Subsidized employment programs serve as a mechanism for offering financial support to employers across public, non-profit, and for-profit sectors, enabling them to create job opportunities for eligible individuals. These programs are highly flexible, enabling modifications in response to various factors, such as shifts in the business cycle and the specific needs of different communities. The employment opportunities generated by these initiatives can range from temporary positions designed to mitigate the effects of economic downturns, transitional positions for individuals moving toward unsubsidized employment, irrespective of macroeconomic conditions, and long-term positions that deliver ongoing support for individuals in need of sustained assistance. By helping individuals transition to unsubsidized employment or providing ongoing support for those who need it, we ultimately aid them in achieving economic stability.

7. Unsubsidized Employment

NLEN offers structured employment experiences, including apprenticeships and work-based learning opportunities, alongside comprehensive case management and support services. This coordinated approach helps individuals successfully transition to unsubsidized employment.

D. Outcomes and Impact: The NLEN Model: A Proven Framework for Reentry and Workforce Integration

Founded in 1999, NLEN operates on the principle that employment is a cornerstone of both personal transformation and community renewal. Its programs address the full continuum of barriers faced by returning citizens—from trauma and unemployment to financial instability and stigma.

NLEN's model integrates five interdependent components:

1. Workforce Preparation and Job Readiness

- Programs such as U-Turn Permitted provide cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), career readiness workshops, and soft skills training.
- Participants learn workplace communication, emotional regulation, and goal setting.

2. Job Placement and Employer Partnerships

- NLEN collaborates with employers across industries, offering pre-screened, trained candidates who are job-ready.
- Employers benefit from reduced turnover and WOTC tax credits.

3. Social Enterprise Employment

- Sweet Beginnings™, LLC and the beelove® café offer paid transitional jobs for returning citizens.
- Participants gain practical experience in production, marketing, and customer service, while rebuilding work histories.

4. Wraparound Support Services

- Case management, trauma-informed counseling, and peer mentorship sustain long-term employment retention and reduce relapse or reoffense.

This integrated approach is not only holistic but evidence-based, designed to address the complex intersections of employment, mental health, and economic exclusion.

The outcomes of NLEN's programs demonstrate the tangible power of combining Fair Chance policy with community-based practice.

Indicator	NLEN Outcomes (2000–2024)	Comparative Benchmarks
Employment Placement	Over 70% of program graduates employed within 6 months	National reentry employment average: ~45%
Job Retention	92% retention after 6 months	70% national benchmark
Recidivism	4–8% for Sweet Beginnings participants	36–52% statewide (Illinois DOC, 2023)
Economic ROI	\$1 = \$5.60 in social and economic return (average wage gain, \$4.25)	Average reentry ROI: \$1 = \$3.00
Financial Stability	85% report improved income and credit	N/A (program-specific indicator)

Beyond quantitative outcomes, NLEN's work generates qualitative transformations: restored family relationships, community engagement, and renewed personal agency among participants who had long been excluded from the mainstream economy.

NLEN's model demonstrates that reentry success is not simply a matter of personal reform but of public policy design. Each successful employment placement represents both an individual victory and a public savings.

- The average cost of incarceration in Illinois exceeds **\$45,000** per year per inmate.
- For every 100 individuals who avoid re-incarceration the state diverts approximately **\$4.5 million** in taxpayer dollars annually.

Fair Chance Hiring, when coupled with community-based reentry systems, thus becomes a cost-effective public safety strategy. It reduces correctional expenditures, enhances the state's labor force participation, and stimulates local economic development through increased household income and consumer spending.

NLEN's success aligns directly with state and city policy frameworks:

- **Illinois R3 Program (Restore, Reinvest, Renew):** NLEN embodies the R3 mission by reinvesting cannabis tax revenues into communities most harmed by incarceration and disinvestment.
- **City of Chicago's Office of Reentry Policy and Practice:** NLEN serves as a key implementation partner, demonstrating scalable best practices in workforce development, housing, and behavioral health integration.



- **Cook County's Equity and Inclusion Goals:** By linking economic opportunity to justice reform, NLEN supports the county's broader vision for inclusive growth.

This policy synergy underscores NLEN's role not just as a service provider, but as a strategic partner in systems change.

To replicate and expand the proven effectiveness of NLEN's Fair Chance approach, policymakers should pursue the following actions:

1. **Integrate Fair Chance Hiring into all public-sector employment and procurement.** Require city, county, and state contractors to adopt Fair Chance standards and report on compliance.
2. **Institutionalize multi-year funding for community-based reentry programs.** Shift from short-term grants to sustained investment that supports staffing, evaluation, and expansion.
3. **Develop statewide Fair Chance Employer Certification programs.** Recognize businesses demonstrating commitment to hiring justice-impacted individuals.
4. **Leverage social enterprise innovation.** Support and replicate transitional employment models like Sweet Beginnings™ as proven workforce pathways.
5. **Strengthen cross-agency data integration.** Develop centralized systems to track employment, recidivism, and workforce outcomes across state agencies and partners. Expand trauma-informed and behavioral health supports. Co-locate mental health and reentry services to address trauma as a core employment barrier.
6. **Promote inclusive entrepreneurship.** Invest in small business development, microfinance, and cooperative ownership models within high-incarceration neighborhoods.

E. Policy Significance

Scaling Proven Solutions

NLEN's measurable impact extends across employment, income stability, and reduced recidivism. Program evaluations and administrative data highlight consistent success over two decades.

The North Lawndale Employment Network stands as a national exemplar of what happens when Fair Chance Hiring policy meets community-based implementation. Its outcomes - lower recidivism, higher employment, and measurable economic return - prove that opportunity is more effective than punishment in building safe and thriving communities.

For policymakers, the lesson is clear: investing in Fair Chance Hiring and NLEN-style reentry ecosystems is not charity—it is smart, data-driven public policy. It delivers fiscal efficiency, labor force expansion, and long-term community resilience.

As Illinois and other states continue to confront labor shortages and public safety challenges, scaling NLEN's model represents a pragmatic, evidence-backed strategy for inclusive economic growth and sustainable justice reform.

Beyond individual outcomes, NLEN contributes to neighborhood stabilization, reduced crime, and increased civic engagement - key goals aligned with the City of Chicago's equitable development agenda.

The NLEN model demonstrates that reentry success is not a matter of individual reform but of structural reinvestment. By integrating employment, behavioral health, and financial coaching, NLEN provides a blueprint for comprehensive reentry ecosystems that can be scaled across Illinois and nationally.

Policy lessons from the NLEN model:

1. **Integrated Services Work.** Employment outcomes improve when job placement is paired with counseling, financial literacy, and legal support.
2. **Social Enterprise Creates Transitional Stability.** Businesses like Sweet Beginnings provide paid training environments that build confidence and skills.
3. **Community Ownership Strengthens Accountability.** Locally rooted programs are more responsive and trusted than external interventions.
4. **Fair Chance Employment Benefits Everyone.** Reducing recidivism through work lowers taxpayer costs and enhances neighborhood safety.
5. **Sustained Funding Is Critical.** Long-term investment - through R3 grants, philanthropy, and public contracts - is necessary for continuity and impact.

F. Replication and Scalability

NLEN's integrated framework offers a replicable model for other communities facing similar challenges. Key components for successful replication include:

- **Anchor Partnerships:** Collaboration with city agencies, local employers, and educational institutions.
- **Data Systems:** Continuous performance measurement and participant tracking.
- **Flexible Funding Streams:** Combining public and private sources to sustain programming.
- **Community Engagement:** Embedding reentry work in local planning and economic development strategies.

G. Economic and Social Return on Investment

The economic rationale for programs like NLEN's is compelling. Each prevented re-incarceration saves Illinois an average of \$45,000 annually in correctional costs. Given NLEN's low recidivism rate, these savings far exceed program operating costs.

A 2023 cost-benefit analysis by the Great Cities Institute estimated that every \$1 invested in NLEN programs yields approximately \$5.60 in social and economic returns, including:

- Increased earnings among participants.
- Reduced incarceration costs.
- Decreased reliance on public benefits.
- Enhanced community economic activity.

H. Voices from the Community

Participants consistently emphasize the transformative power of NLEN's approach:

"NLEN gave me a job, but more importantly, they gave me my confidence back. I learned that my past doesn't define me."

Program Graduate, Sweet Beginnings (2023)

"The beelove® program taught me responsibility and teamwork. It's not just about making honey - it's about building a future."

Participant, Transitional Employment Cohort (2022)

These narratives humanize the data and underscore the broader cultural shift NLEN fosters - from exclusion to empowerment.

I. Policy Implications

The success of NLEN offers clear guidance for policymakers seeking to align economic development with public safety:

1. Integrate reentry into workforce strategies. Reentry services should be core to workforce development, not a peripheral add-on.
2. Prioritize community-based delivery. Local organizations are best positioned to build trust and provide culturally competent services.
3. Support social enterprise innovation. State and municipal procurement can strengthen employment pipelines through targeted purchasing.
4. Expand Fair Chance compliance and evaluation. Collecting and publishing disaggregated data ensures accountability and continuous improvement.
5. Invest in long-term funding. Multi-year grants and contracts sustain proven programs and avoid the volatility of short-term cycles.

J. NLEN as a Model

NLEN stands as a model of transformative reentry - where individuals once marginalized by systemic inequities become contributors to economically-driven community renewal. Its success demonstrates that economic justice and public safety are not competing goals but mutually reinforcing ones.

The challenge for policymakers is not whether reentry programs work, but whether we are willing to scale them to meet the need. NLEN demonstrates that with opportunity, support, and dignity, people can and do transform their lives - and, in doing so, positively impact their communities.



SECTION V: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION



NLEN programs provide an environment for building teamwork and confidence, and create pathways to long-term employment.

This section emphasizes the broader implications of the Great Cities Institute and NLEN partnership for equitable urban policy.

NLEN has demonstrated effective practices for reducing recidivism and aiding individuals who have been incarcerated as they transition back into the workforce. This report explores various strategies to further enhance the program's successful track record in supporting a broader range of individuals affected by the criminal justice system.

Community-based programs that provide training and placement services for returning citizens have demonstrated varying levels of effectiveness. These

programs are structured differently, with different degrees of focus on training and job placement.

NLEN aims to facilitate systemic transformation by developing comprehensive and strategic reentry initiatives. These efforts aim to enhance the likelihood that individuals will successfully and safely reintegrate into the community after periods of incarceration.

NLEN collaborates with leaders from reentry coalitions and local authorities to improve reentry policies and outcomes through informed practices. To optimize service delivery models and strategies that enhance access and improve labor

market outcomes for individuals impacted by the criminal justice system, it is essential to establish a comprehensive framework of collaboration and coordination. This framework should integrate community-based organizations, philanthropic entities, state and local justice agencies, community colleges, and workforce development systems. Such an approach will facilitate effective resource allocation, streamline service provision, and enhance programmatic outcomes for this population.

The Transition from Prison to Community model serves as a critical framework for advancing systemic reform in reentry processes. By promoting collaboration among law enforcement, correctional institutions, community supervision agencies, parole boards, public human services, and community-based service organizations, this model aims to enhance rehabilitation efforts. This collaborative approach not only supports individuals as they reintegrate into their communities but also strengthens the overall social infrastructure, facilitating a more cohesive and resilient community environment.

Active engagement from leaders in local courts, corrections, and community supervision agencies is critical to the success of reentry coalitions. The strategies, programs, and services intended to facilitate reentry must be consistent with the decisions made by these officials concerning sentencing, release, revocation, and the objectives of supervision. To ensure this alignment, it is imperative for leaders in the court, corrections, and community supervision sectors to take an active role in defining the priorities for reentry services and determining the methodologies and timing of their implementation at the individual case level.

A. Overview

The preceding analysis reveals a consistent truth: economic exclusion and mass incarceration are mutually reinforcing systems. In neighborhoods like North Lawndale, these forces have produced generations of economic precarity, community destabilization, and deep distrust of public institutions.

However, the data and case evidence also demonstrate that reentry employment, Fair Chance hiring, and community-based workforce models, such as those pioneered by NLEN, can dramatically alter this trajectory.

This section outlines key policy recommendations that bridge the gap between research findings and actionable policy solutions.

B. Guiding Policy Principles

All recommendations are grounded in three overarching principles:

1. Reentry Is Economic Policy

Employment access for justice-involved individuals is not merely a social service - it is a macroeconomic and workforce strategy essential to neighborhood revitalization and public safety.

2. Place-Based Interventions Matter

Solutions must be rooted in community context. Strategies effective in North Lawndale may differ from those required elsewhere, but the guiding approach - community-led design, cross-sector collaboration, and local accountability - should be universal.

3. Data-Driven and Human-Centered Approaches

Effective reentry systems integrate quantitative evidence with lived experience, using continuous evaluation to refine interventions while maintaining respect for human dignity.

C. Policy Recommendations

1. Integrate Reentry into Workforce and Economic Development Plans

State and local workforce boards should embed reentry programming into mainstream economic development strategies, ensuring alignment between Fair Chance hiring, sectoral workforce initiatives, and inclusive procurement policies.

Action Steps:

- Include justice-involved workers as a target population in regional workforce investment plans.
- Incorporate reentry employment in city and county economic recovery strategies.
- Partner with chambers of commerce to develop second-chance hiring networks.

2. Strengthen Fair Chance Compliance and Employer Incentives

While Illinois leads the nation in Fair Chance legislation, implementation remains inconsistent.

Expanding enforcement and employer support is critical to realizing full policy impact.

Action Steps:

- Create a statewide Fair Chance Employer Certification program to recognize compliant businesses.
- Expand awareness of the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) and local hiring incentives.
- Provide technical assistance to employers on individualized assessments and record evaluation.

- Integrate Fair Chance hiring benchmarks into public contracts and vendor procurement.

3. Expand and Stabilize Funding for Community-Based Reentry Services

Short-term grants limit program continuity and innovation. Multi-year funding enables organizations like NLEN to sustain their staff, monitor outcomes, and tailor services to meet community needs.

Action Steps:

- Create a dedicated state reentry innovation fund, capitalized through cannabis tax revenue and corporate philanthropy.
- Align funding cycles across agencies (IDOC, DCEO, DHS) to support coordinated service delivery.
- Increase capacity-building grants for community organizations to strengthen evaluation, technology, and case management infrastructure.

4. Reform Occupational Licensing and Regulatory Barriers

Many professions in Illinois remain inaccessible to individuals with prior convictions due to outdated licensing restrictions. Reforming these barriers is crucial for a full and successful reintegration.

Action Steps:

- Continue to review and revise occupational licensing statutes for equity and relevance.
- Develop “conditional licensing pathways” for returning citizens demonstrating rehabilitation.
- Encourage state licensing boards to adopt risk-based evaluation criteria aligned with the Illinois Human Rights Act.

5. Expand Access to Housing and Financial Services

Stable housing and financial inclusion are foundational to successful reentry. Yet returning citizens often face exclusion from public housing, credit markets, and mainstream banking.

Action Steps:

- Remove federal and local prohibitions against housing access for individuals with prior convictions.
- Expand reentry-specific housing vouchers and landlord incentive programs.
- Support community development financial institutions (CDFIs) to offer low-interest loans and financial literacy coaching.

6. Prioritize Behavioral Health and Trauma-Informed Care

The intersection of trauma, substance use, and incarceration demands a holistic response. Behavioral health should be a fully integrated component of workforce and reentry services.

Action Steps:

- Co-locate behavioral health services with workforce programs.
- Expand Medicaid reimbursement for community-based mental health services.
- Integrate trauma-informed care training across all reentry provider networks.
- Fund peer mentoring and support groups to sustain long-term recovery.

7. Leverage Social Enterprise as a Transitional Employment Strategy

Social enterprises like Sweet Beginnings demonstrate how business innovation can align with social impact. Expanding such models can simultaneously create jobs and build skills for populations facing labor market exclusion.

Action Steps:

- Provide state startup grants and technical assistance for reentry-focused social enterprises.
- Include social enterprises in city and county procurement lists for catering, maintenance, and light manufacturing.

- Establish impact investment funds for mission-driven employment ventures.
- Support public-private partnerships to scale proven models like beelove® statewide.

8. Develop Local Hiring and Anchor Institution Partnerships

Large employers and anchor institutions located in or near high-poverty neighborhoods should be encouraged to recruit and retain local talent.

Action Steps:

- Implement local hiring ordinances for city-funded development projects.
- Encourage hospitals, universities, and logistics companies to create community workforce agreements.
- Integrate apprenticeship pipelines into local capital improvement and infrastructure projects.
- Expand transportation access for residents to reach regional job centers.

9. Establish Data Transparency and Evaluation Systems

To ensure accountability, Illinois and Chicago should invest in robust systems for tracking reentry outcomes, Fair Chance compliance, and neighborhood-level impacts.

Action Steps:

- Create a statewide Reentry Data Dashboard integrating data from IDOC, workforce agencies, and community partners.
- Require annual public reporting on recidivism, employment outcomes, and program ROI.
- Fund partnerships between research institutions and community organizations to evaluate program effectiveness.

D. Cross-Sector Collaboration Framework

Effective reentry reform requires alignment across multiple levels of governance and community engagement. The GCI-NLEN framework identifies four pillars of collaboration:

Stakeholder	Core Function	Key Actions
State and Local Government	Policy, funding, and oversight	Align regulations, coordinate funding streams, and track statewide outcomes.
Employers and Industry Associations	Job creation and Fair Chance implementation	Offer apprenticeships, adopt inclusive hiring practices, and mentor small businesses.
Community-Based Organizations	Service delivery and advocacy	Provide job readiness, behavioral health, and wraparound supports.
Academic and Research Institutions	Data analysis and policy evaluation	Conduct longitudinal studies and generate actionable evidence for policymakers.
Financial Stability	85% report improved income and credit	N/A (program-specific indicator)

This cross-sector model ensures that interventions are **coordinated, data-informed, and grounded in lived experience**.

E. Broader Implications for Urban Policy

The lessons from North Lawndale extend beyond reentry and workforce development. They speak to the broader question of **what equitable urban policy looks like in practice**.

- **Community-Based Planning:** Neighborhoods must be partners, not subjects, in development processes.
- **Inclusive Growth:** Economic revitalization cannot be achieved without addressing racial and structural inequities.
- **Engaged Research:** Universities, like the Great Cities Institute, play a critical role in producing applied knowledge that translates directly into local impact.

F. Conclusion: From Research to Action

North Lawndale's story is not only one of persistent struggle but of enduring resilience. The data are clear: decades of disinvestment and punitive policy produced the conditions that sustain poverty and incarceration. Yet, the successes of NLEN, Sweet Beginnings, and Fair Chance Employment reforms demonstrate that different outcomes are possible - when policy aligns with community vision and when opportunity replaces exclusion.

This report offers a blueprint for such alignment. It demonstrates that addressing recidivism is not only about reducing crime, but also about expanding opportunities, restoring dignity, and rebuilding communities.

The Great Cities Institute and NLEN's collaboration stands as a testament to the power of engaged research and community leadership. Together, they show that economic justice and public safety are interdependent goals, achievable through intentional investment, sustained collaboration, and an unwavering belief in the capacity of people to transform their own lives when given a fair chance.

APPENDIX A: A SHORT HISTORY OF REENTRY REFORM IN ILLINOIS

The primary American response to criminal behavior has historically been imprisonment in various forms (Meskel, 1999). Among developed nations, the United States has maintained the longest and highest rates of incarceration. However, this extensive use of imprisonment has failed to effectively tackle the root causes of criminal behavior. According to The Sentencing Project, the start of mass incarceration began in 1973 at the conclusion of President Nixon's administration.

The growing demand to reduce crime rates prompted a range of crime control initiatives, enacted both locally and by the Clinton administration, that drew on the longstanding American tradition of prosecution and incarceration. For various offenses, sentences became longer and mandatory, the criminalization of drug use intensified, and many major cities increased their police presence. New York and Chicago, in particular, gained recognition for their enforcement of minor offenses, following the principles of broken windows theory. In 1995, the introduction of the first truth-in-sentencing laws was succeeded by more stringent state and federal regulations, along with increased funding for law enforcement.

The outcomes of the implemented policies were dual in nature: there was a measurable reduction in crime rates in New York and Los Angeles, and to a lesser extent in Chicago. However, in Illinois, this perceived improvement came at a significant cost. The ramifications extended beyond a dramatic surge in its prison population, violations of civil rights, and a substantial segment of the population was encumbered with criminal records, which adversely affected employment prospects, marriageability, voting rights, and overall dignity. This escalation in

incarceration rates was marked by heightened drug sentencing standards, an uptick in violent crime offenders, a rise in parole violations and revocations, along with extended durations of incarceration (LaVigne & Mamalian, 2003). Moreover, the financial burden of administering criminal justice in Illinois became increasingly untenable. By 1999, the Illinois Department of Corrections' parole agents were managing caseloads averaging 160 cases per agent (Ibid, 22), underscoring the systemic strains on resources and oversight (LaVigne & Mamalian, 2003).

The transition from punitive to restorative policy strategies in Illinois did not occur as a single, definitive moment but rather began to take shape in the early 2000s. This shift was driven by the growing awareness of the detrimental human and social costs associated with punitive crime-fighting tactics. During this time, the efforts of reform advocates, such as NLEN, started to gain momentum. Gradually, it became clear that public support for reducing punitive measures outweighed the desire to maintain a "tough on crime" approach. The emerging restorative framework sought solutions that avoided incarceration while promoting the involvement of justice-involved individuals in both the economy and society. This approach also recognized the humanity of predominantly young African Americans who had become ensnared in dysfunctional street life, drug addiction, and petty crime from a young age. This change was driven by a critical reassessment of the initial civil rights reforms of the 1960s, which – despite their intentions – failed to achieve adequate desegregation, education, or meaningful opportunities for marginalized communities.

By the early 1990s, heightened awareness and expanded discourse surrounding the persistent issues of racial segregation, economic decline, and failing public education contributed to a growing consensus among progressive policymakers that the negative impacts of punitive criminal justice policies must be addressed. While individuals possess agency in their choices to commit offenses, the reality is that many offenders face circumstances that are deeply rooted in poverty, inadequate education, and substance addiction. Furthermore, additional research has highlighted the structural racism that distorts policing practices, law enforcement approaches, and, at times, the laws themselves.

Despite the prevailing trend toward punitive measures in national crime reduction policies during the 1990s, several meaningful reforms emerged. Notably, there was a significant enhancement in educational programs within correctional facilities, and the establishment of innovative problem-solving courts. These specialized courts were specifically designed to address a range of social issues, including mental health challenges, substance use disorders, and the unique requirements of veterans. These developments reflect a nuanced approach to criminal justice reform, striking a balance between punitive measures and rehabilitative and supportive initiatives.

In Chicago, several key organizations have emerged as pivotal players in the movement for justice reform in Illinois. In many Chicago neighborhoods, providing social services often involves working with individuals who have been involved in the justice system. NLEN was established in 1999 as part of a comprehensive local planning initiative aimed at addressing employment challenges, particularly within the North Lawndale community. While NLEN provides essential support services and employment assistance to a diverse range of individuals, it is most renowned for its targeted programs supporting justice-involved individuals, as detailed in the 2002 report “Drugs, Crime, and Consequences: Arrests and Incarceration in North Lawndale.”

However, at the inception of NLEN, only a handful of organizations focused specifically on individuals with justice involvement. Prominent among these were:

- **Safer Foundation:** The largest and most established organization serving justice-involved individuals.
- **St. Leonard's:** A homeless shelter that specifically supports individuals in the reentry process.
- **Cabrini-Green Legal Aid:** A legal service provider specializing in record sealing and expungement, among other legal assistance
- **Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities (TASC):** Focuses on treatment and alternatives to incarceration.
- **John Howard Association:** Advocates for prison monitoring and systemic reforms.

The Governor Blagojevich Administration

Rod Blagojevich was elected Governor of Illinois in 2002. Recognizing the connection between substance use disorders and criminal behavior, the Blagojevich administration established the Sheridan National Model Drug Prison & Reentry Program in 2002 (Reichert & Ruzich, 2012). This program effectively restructured a state prison to prioritize comprehensive recovery and reentry services for offenders battling substance use issues. The program has received widespread acclaim as a model of effective intervention, and the state subsequently launched a model methadone treatment program at the Southwestern Illinois Correctional Center (Press Release, May 19, 2008).

In 2003, the Operation Spotlight Parole Reform Plan was implemented to enhance the effectiveness of parole staff in the reentry process by adding 100 new parole agents statewide. This initiative aimed to support reentering residents in staying on track through improved case management and reduced caseloads for parole agents. Additionally, the state launched a significant transitional jobs program intended to assist over 800 ex-offenders each year

in securing full-time, permanent employment (Press Release, May 19, 2008).

In 2002, the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) received a \$2 million grant from the federal Going Home program to support prisoner reentry efforts in North Lawndale. This initiative was made possible through a collaboration between IDOC, NLEN, and Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities (TASC) (Portrait of Prisoner Reentry in Illinois, 4). In 2004, the state launched Redeploy Illinois, a groundbreaking program designed to offer diversionary alternatives for juvenile offenders (Illinois Redeploy website).

The Governor established the Community Safety & Reentry Commission to formulate a statewide strategy aimed at reducing recidivism in ten targeted regions with significant populations of ex-offenders. The Commission's mandate included conducting statewide consultations to gather insights and recommendations from communities significantly impacted by high ex-offender populations, as well as researching effective models from other states and countries. Notably, Brenda Palms and NLEN were integral members of the Commission. The state acknowledged this initiative played a crucial role in "successfully lowering recidivism rates from their highest levels, decreasing the prevalence of new crimes among parolees, and slowing the growth of the prison population" (Press Release, May 29, 2008).

The Blagojevich administration focused on strategies aimed at reducing recidivism rates, examining the intersection of substance use disorders and offending, and the amount of cost savings generated, while also assessing the associated cost savings generated through these interventions.

The administration's dedication to addressing the issue was further demonstrated through an unprecedented planning process focused on prison population and reentry challenges. In 2004, Governor Blagojevich unveiled "Inside Out: A Plan to Reduce Recidivism and Improve Public Safety," a

comprehensive report produced by the Community Safety & Reentry Commission. This 22-member Commission was tasked with formulating strategies aimed at reducing recidivism rates while enhancing public safety outcomes. Co-chaired by Rev. Jesse Jackson and Peoria County State's Attorney Kevin Lyons, the report emphasizes a collaborative approach to addressing recidivism and promoting community safety (Reentry Commission, 2004).

Governor Blagojevich was re-elected for a second term in 2006. That same year, the General Assembly enacted SB 1279, which provides a \$600 tax credit to employers who hire individuals with previous felony convictions (Bill Status, 2006). The Illinois Income Tax Act permits the allocation of income tax credits for partners, shareholders of Subchapter S corporations, and owners of limited liability companies that are classified as partnerships. It specifies that the maximum credit for wages paid to qualified ex-offenders cannot exceed \$600 per taxable year for each eligible ex-offender and is calculated as 5% of the qualified wages paid to them (currently, this amount is set at 25% of the federal work opportunity credit for wages paid to eligible offenders). Additionally, Key terms such as "qualified wages" and "qualified ex-offender" are explicitly defined within the legislation.

Commission Recommendations:

- **Building Community Capacity:** The report emphasized the importance of collaborating with smaller, community-based organizations dedicated to crime prevention and risk reduction for individuals who have been formerly incarcerated. In response, the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) has increased its budget for community-based contracts by approximately \$1 million and proposed an additional \$500,000 increase for the fiscal year 2009.
- **Statewide Job Preparation and Placement Program:** The report recommended a greater emphasis on equipping inmates with the skills necessary for honest employment during their

incarceration, as well as providing supportive services to help them secure employment upon parole. In light of this, the state has launched a Statewide Job Preparation and Placement Program, operated by the SAFER Foundation. This program collaborates with community colleges to offer job preparation resources to all inmates across state prisons and includes a referral system connecting them to SAFER offices in the community for job placement assistance.

- **A Safer Return:** The report advocated for the establishment of model programs that enhance capacity in high-impact communities. A recent partnership with the MacArthur Foundation and the SAFER Foundation, titled “Safer Return,” is set to launch this summer. This initiative will focus on entire communities, rather than specific populations, and will allocate intensive, community-based resources to all parolees returning to East Garfield Park in Chicago, an area with one of the highest concentrations of parolees in the city. The program is scheduled to operate from 2008 through 2013.
- **Transition Units:** The report recommended that all inmates transition through a designated Unit phase during the last three to six months of their sentences to ensure they receive thorough preparation for reintegrating into their communities. IDOC plans to initiate a new Transition Unit program in six prisons by August and is working toward a gradual rollout of this program to all facilities statewide (Governor’s Office, May 19, 2008).

Illinois was not unique in undergoing significant transformative changes. By 2007, President George W. Bush, along with a significant segment of Congress, acknowledged the critical need to reduce recidivism and enhance reentry processes as a strategy to address the unsustainable growth of prison populations across the nation. In his 2004 State of the Union address, President Bush referred to America as “the land of second chances,” asserting that “when the gates of the

prison open, the path ahead should lead to a better life” (Bush, 2004). In April 2008, with Bush’s support, Congress passed the Second Chance Act, a federal commitment to reentry strategies aimed at reducing recidivism, improving public safety, and lowering correctional costs for state and local governments. The Act received bipartisan support and was endorsed by leaders in law enforcement, corrections, the court system, behavioral health, and other pertinent sectors (National Resource Center, Second Chance Act website).

Over the years, Second Chance initiatives have offered a comprehensive range of services, including workforce training and development, substance use disorder treatment, educational programs, housing stability solutions, family support services, mentoring, and victim assistance programs. Additionally, funding allocated to Second Chance initiatives has been instrumental in enhancing the overall infrastructure and operations of the criminal justice system.

Notably, in 2010, NLEN launched its CTA Equipment Repair Program, which aimed to provide specialized training and employment opportunities within the transportation sector.

The Quinn Administration

In 2009, Deputy Governor Patrick Quinn became Governor of Illinois. While he continued the initiatives of the previous administration through the implementation of the Crime Reduction Act of 2009, the new governor adopted a markedly more moderate rhetorical approach, emphasizing that justice reform should shift towards enhancing the effectiveness of the correctional system rather than solely emphasizing successful reentry strategies. In discussing the Crime Reduction Act, he remarked, “Director Randle’s primary aim is to protect the public while also modernizing and enhancing the state’s correctional facilities.” In turn, IDOC Director Randle noted that new resources would “enable law enforcement to better allocate resources, more effectively reduce crime, and strengthen communities. At the same time, it will assist us in

managing safer, more efficient prisons” (Quinn Press Release, 2009). Nevertheless, the new administration regarded progressive reentry and prison reform as integral to the broader justice reform agenda.

The Crime Reduction Act of 2009 focused on reducing prison sentencing and consisted of three primary elements designed to further decrease prison sentencing (Crime Reduction Act, 2009):

- **Funding for Community-Based Diversion Programs:** The Act allocates resources to support diversion programs that operate outside the traditional penal system, specifically targeting non-violent offenders.
- **Adult Redeploy:** Aimed at adults, this program mirrors the existing juvenile Redeploy model, creating structured diversion opportunities specifically for non-violent offenders to mitigate the impact of imprisonment.
- **Sentencing Policy Advisory Council:** A newly established state entity is tasked with conducting research pertinent to criminal justice and sentencing policies. Additionally, it is responsible for the oversight of law enforcement and corrections trends within Illinois, ensuring that data-driven insights inform legislative and policy decisions.

In 2013, Governor Quinn launched a planning initiative aimed at reducing the prison population in Illinois through the establishment of the Illinois State Commission on Criminal Justice Reform. The commission’s strategic recommendations sought to achieve a 25% reduction in the prison population over the course of a decade. Central to these reforms was the 2013 Second Chance Act, which primarily emphasized enhancing employment opportunities for individuals with criminal records. To incentivize employers, Senate Bill 1659 raised the state tax credit for hiring returning citizens from a maximum of \$600 to \$1,500. Additionally, HB 3010 introduced a second chance probation statute, allowing non-violent offenders the opportunity for expungement following a two-year probationary period. Furthermore, HB 2470 broadened the mechanisms available for expungement (Quinn, Second Chance Act). In the same year, the Governor

issued an executive order granting individuals with felony convictions eligibility for employment in state government positions, effectively broadening their reintegration opportunities into the workforce (Quinn, Second Chance Act; Criminal Lawyer Illinois). These legislative and executive actions collectively represented a comprehensive approach to criminal justice reform focused on rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

Ban the Box

Ban the Box is a justice reform initiative designed to delay criminal background checks until later in the hiring process. Effective January 2015, employers in Illinois were prohibited from including questions about criminal convictions on job applications. The Job Opportunities and Qualified Applicants Act mandates that, in most job sectors, employers must wait until an applicant has been deemed qualified for the position and notified of an impending interview before inquiring about any past offenses. This legislative change is designed to reduce discrimination against individuals with criminal records and promote fairer employment opportunities.

Problem-Solving Courts

Beginning in the late 1990s, various states across the country began to explore the concept of “problem-solving courts”. Problem-solving courts focus on non-violent offenders facing charges related to substance use, DUIs, domestic violence, mental health issues, or veteran status. The guiding principle behind these courts was that individuals in these categories often faced personal challenges that traditional incarceration would not effectively resolve, and that their needs might be better addressed through referrals to specialized organizations that offer a rehabilitative approach. Non-violent offenders who adhered to the judge’s directives and monitoring could avoid serving prison sentences. The first mental health court in the United States was established in 1997, followed by the establishment of veteran’s courts around 2008. The growth of these specialized courts gained momentum throughout the 2010s. In 1998, Cook County launched its first drug court, and in 2013, an Access to Community Treatment court was launched.

In 2015, the Illinois Supreme Court established formalized standards for problem-solving courts, which are designed to address the underlying issues of offenders rather than focusing solely on punitive measures. Currently, Illinois operates eight dedicated mental health courts, while Cook County has a total of 21 problem-solving courts across various domains, reflecting an integrated approach to justice that emphasizes rehabilitation and mental health support (Hughes and Reichert, 2017).

By 2016, the Illinois Policy Institute, a pro-free market think tank, had recognized the challenges associated with prison overcrowding and its significant financial implications. The Institute advocated for reforms that would permit the majority of nonviolent offenders to have their criminal records sealed, thereby mitigating the risk of liability for businesses hiring individuals with such records. Additionally, it proposed the removal of legal impediments that affect access to various licensed professions for individuals with criminal histories (Jackson, 2016).

The Rauner Administration

In 2016, Bruce Rauner was elected Governor of Illinois. While he identified as a political conservative, he took a more progressive stance on several social issues and opted to build upon the advancements achieved over the previous 12 years in criminal justice reform. This decision reflected the increasing acceptance of justice reform across the political and social spectrum in Illinois.

In alignment with the initiatives established by his predecessors, Governor Rauner convened an expert panel tasked with identifying strategies to further reduce the state's incarceration rates and enhance the reentry process for individuals transitioning out of the prison system. In 2016, he initiated the Commission on Criminal Justice and Sentencing Reform with the objective of achieving a 25% reduction in the prison population by 2025. (Governor's Press Release, 2016). In December of that year, he signed the resulting reform legislation into law.

To address the challenge of high prison admissions, the Commission will examine diversion strategies, parole policies, and staffing levels. To address the issue of extended prison stays, the review will examine felony sentence durations, the application of good conduct credits, potential reductions in the percentages stipulated by Truth in Sentencing laws, and the incorporation of risk and needs assessments into sentencing decisions and the determination of incarceration duration.

In 2016, legislation signed by Governor Rauner mandated that judges must provide on-the-record justifications when sentencing a defendant with a low-level felony to prison, particularly if the individual has no prior violent convictions. Additionally, the law prohibits sentencing juveniles to prison for low-level drug offenses, reduces the duration of mandatory probation for young offenders, streamlines the expungement process for juvenile records, and removes certain employment restrictions for individuals with criminal records.

In 2016, Illinois passed legislation (PL 099-0876) aimed at enhancing employment prospects in the healthcare sector for individuals with criminal records. This law stipulates that a prior conviction cannot be the sole reason for denying a license application in various professions, including funeral directing, embalming, roofing, barbering, cosmetology, esthetics, hair braiding, and nail technology.

The legislation also introduced other noteworthy reforms regarding drug offenses, reclassifying the possession of small amounts of marijuana as a civil violation subject to fines, rather than a criminal misdemeanor that could result in jail time (ILCS 099-0876).

The 2017 Neighborhood Safety Act enhanced rehabilitation efforts by introducing comprehensive job training and substance abuse treatment programs for offenders. Moreover, it broadened the criteria for probation eligibility by increasing the range of offenses that could qualify for alternative sentencing rather than incarceration (Alliance for Safety and Justice, 2017).

The J. B. Pritzker Administration

In 2018, J.B. Pritzker was elected Governor of Illinois, marking a significant shift in the state's approach to criminal justice reform. The subsequent five years witnessed significant progress in justice reform, the reentry process, and addressing the social factors linked to justice involvement. Pritzker's administration placed a strong emphasis on connecting with marginalized and under-resourced neighborhoods in Chicago, reflecting a commitment to advancing systemic reform. The Lieutenant Governor, Juliana Stratton, has extensive experience in the field of justice reform. Stratton previously held the position of director at the Center for Public Safety and Justice at the University of Illinois Chicago and served as Executive Director of the Cook County Justice Advisory Council, where she focused on improving public safety and equitable justice outcomes.

Low-level drug offenses have historically been a significant factor contributing to criminal records and incarceration rates. As a result, one of Governor Pritzker's initial and most notable justice reforms was the Illinois Cannabis Regulation and Taxation Act of 2019, which legalized the recreational use and production of cannabis and allowed for the expungement of past convictions for possession of under 30 grams (ILCS 2019). To address the detrimental effects of the war on drugs that lasted over the last four decades, the act introduced taxes on cannabis sales and directed the resulting revenue toward reinvesting in services for disadvantaged communities through the R3 program – Restore, Reinvest, and Renewal program. Under this program, the state allocates a significant portion of cannabis sales revenue to organizations that provide essential services in lower-income neighborhoods across the state. The selection criteria for funding include metrics such as rates of gun violence, child poverty, unemployment, and incarceration. The services funded under the R3 framework include Civil Legal Aid, Economic Development, Reentry, Violence Prevention, and Youth Development projects, all of which aim to foster resilience and address systemic inequities within these communities.

In 2019, Governor Pritzker launched the Justice, Equity, and Opportunity Initiative to align criminal justice reforms across state agencies, with a particular focus on the prison system and sentencing practices. This initiative encompasses the implementation of bias-free assessment tools, improved access to healthcare for incarcerated individuals, enhanced educational programs, and various other essential measures. Lieutenant Governor Stratton was appointed as the chair. "The JEO Initiative will transition us from a primarily punitive system to one that investigates the underlying causes of the issues we face, while developing solutions that place the community at the forefront." – echoing the language of former Governor Rauner (Governor's Press Release, 2019).

The program aims to address a wide range of issues within the criminal justice system through the following initiatives:

- Convening and fostering a collaborative environment among stakeholders, state agencies, and the organizations they collaborate with.
- Enhancing communication across state agencies to ensure a coordinated and comprehensive approach to transforming the criminal justice system and successfully implementing necessary changes.
- Supporting research and pilot programs that test innovative reform efforts, along with providing data analysis to assess the effectiveness of these programs and guide future initiatives.
- Advising decision-makers to ensure that the various branches of the Illinois government work proactively to create a fairer and equitable criminal justice system (Annual Report, 2019).

The program's goals include:

- Addressing the social determinants of crime and incarceration.
- Improving equitable deflection and diversion opportunities within the justice system.

- Enhancing conditions and addressing the needs of vulnerable populations in correctional facilities.
- Supporting positive reentry outcomes to reduce recidivism.

Notable achievements under the JEO umbrella from 2019 to 2023 (JEO Annual Reports, 2019 – 2023) include:

- SB1965 allows reentering offenders to obtain licenses in the healthcare field.
- SB1786 stipulates that a driver's license cannot be suspended for a non-moving violation.
- A 2019 housing program allocated \$3 million for rental subsidies for formerly incarcerated individuals.
- A 2019 program under WIOA assessed reentry services and identified gaps in employment-related services.
- In 2020, the restorative justice pilot program Healing Beyond Harm created opportunities for victims and offenders to restore mutual emotional and mental well-being through mediated conferences.
- HB3653, enacted in 2020, eliminated cash bail for certain offenses. This significant legislation sparked widespread discussion across Illinois and nationwide.
- The 2020 DJJ 21st Century Illinois Transformational Model aimed to improve the juvenile justice process.

Numerous initiatives have been introduced to enhance employment opportunities for individuals reentering society. These initiatives include:

- 2019 Legislation (SB1965): This law created new licensure opportunities for individuals reentering various healthcare professions.
- 2019 Employee Background Fairness Act: This act stipulates that an applicant's previous offense must bear a "substantial relationship" to the job or related tasks when they apply for a position.

- 2021 Expansion of Ban the Box Rights: This expansion strengthens the rights of reentering job applicants by prohibiting employers from asking about criminal history on initial job applications.
- 2021 Returning Residents Clean Jobs Training Program: This program provides preparation and placement for individuals in the green industry sector.
- 2021 SB1480: This legislation introduced significant new requirements for employers conducting criminal history checks. Employers are required to perform an individualized assessment that takes into account various mitigating factors, such as the time since conviction, the severity of the offense, surrounding circumstances, age, and evidence of rehabilitation efforts. If this assessment leads to an adverse outcome, the employer must notify the applicant and allow at least five days for the applicant to respond with additional information. If the applicant is still not hired, the employer must provide a clear rationale for the disqualification. The applicant may file a complaint with the Illinois Department of Human Rights if they are unsatisfied with the response. Furthermore, Chicago updated its ordinance in 2023 to reflect the changes in this legislation.
- 2025 Tax Credit for Employers: Employers became eligible for a tax credit of up to \$7,500 for hiring returning citizens.

Other legislation has placed significant emphasis on the reentry process:

- In 2022, every IDOC prison facility is required to have a reentry specialist.
- In 2023, Senate Bill 423, a bipartisan initiative, improved the mandatory supervised release process by reducing the frequency of urine tests after release and requiring a reduction in probation time as long as the offender remains compliant.
- House Bill 1245 established a new Department of Returning Resident Affairs.

- In 2024, Senate Bill 2803 introduced several provisions, including the requirement for the Illinois Secretary of State to provide free ID cards for returning residents.

City of Chicago and Cook County

Up to this point, the focus has been on the initiatives undertaken by Illinois governors and the legislature due to their broad applicability across the state, as well as the State's management of the Department of Corrections and much of the associated reentry system. However, over the past 25 years, the City of Chicago, Cook County, and various other jurisdictions throughout the state have made significant strides in improving reentry and the criminal justice system.

Many Chicago residents would likely argue that the most significant strides toward reducing justice system involvement in the city have been made through a long-standing effort to enhance policing practices. This initiative has focused on lowering police shootings, preventing wrongful arrests, eliminating coerced confessions, and addressing stop-and-frisk procedures. For decades, Chicago has been polarized between those advocating for increased policing and those calling for a reduction, or at least a version of policing that is more responsive to the communities being served. Nevertheless, Chicago's mayors and city officials have increasingly engaged with reentry initiatives and appear to have reached a consensus that prioritizing the social determinants of crime is crucial for ensuring safety in Chicago and revitalizing the city's most underserved neighborhoods by supporting individuals involved in the justice system.

Mayor Harold Washington Administration

The integration of reentry programming within local governance has been a protracted process, paralleling similar developments at the state level over several decades, reflecting a gradual recognition of its significance. In a seminal article from the late 1980s, Rob Mier and Howard

Stanback, prominent figures in Mayor Washington's Office of Employment and Training (MET), notably failed to address reentry issues (Mier & Stanback, 1986-87). Similarly, the 1984 Chicago Development Plan, titled **Chicago Works Together**, which outlines MET's initiatives, does not reference reentry processes. Moreover, the 1996 Chicago Violence Prevention Strategic Plan, which provided an extensive framework for citywide violence mitigation, omitted any discussion on reentry or the repercussions of incarceration and criminal records. Elmer Johnson's 1999 report, **Metropolis 2020: Preparing Metropolitan Chicago for the 21st Century**, intended as a policy guide for the Chicago metropolitan area, also neglects the critical issues of rising incarceration rates and reentry challenges (Johnson, 1999). This continuity of oversight illustrates a persistent gap in the acknowledgment of reentry as a vital component of urban policy and community reintegration efforts.

Mayor Richard Daley Administration

In alignment with the timeline for state-level reforms, Mayor Daley's administration initiated a focus on progressive reentry policies in the early 2000s. In May 2004, he established the Mayoral Policy Caucus on Prisoner Reentry, a collaborative effort involving government officials and community stakeholders aimed at enhancing the reintegration process for individuals returning to Chicago post-incarceration. The Caucus released a report in 2006 that advocated for the creation of "internal guidelines for the City of Chicago's personnel policies concerning criminal background checks, and promoted equitable employment standards" (Rebuilding Lives, 2006). Additionally, Mayor Daley supported the reform of the City's hiring practices as per the recommendations put forth by the Caucus, emphasizing a commitment to improving employment opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals.

In alignment with the Mayor's new hiring policy, the Chicago Department of Human Resources issued guidelines that established standards for all City agencies regarding hiring decisions for individuals



Chicago, Illinois April 6th, 2025: Mural I am a Man by artists Darius Dennis, Robin Alcantara, Jared Diaz, and Ephraim Gebre in the Wicker Park neighborhood.

with criminal records. For the first time, all agencies within the City of Chicago were mandated to consider the age of a person's criminal record, the seriousness of the offense, evidence of rehabilitation, and other mitigating factors when making hiring choices. As part of this updated hiring process, the City of Chicago revised its job application in February 2007 to remove the question concerning criminal history. Now, after the City extends a conditional offer of employment, applicants are required to complete a screening questionnaire that discloses any criminal record. Additionally, among Mayor Daley's initiatives in 2005, the Streets and Sanitation Department partnered with the social enterprise Cleanslate to promote beautification and recycling efforts. In 2006, the Mayor launched a call center to employ formerly incarcerated individuals in collaboration with NLEN (City of Chicago, 311). By 2008, Mayor Daley fully supported effective reentry, as evidenced by his endorsement of the federal Second Chance Act.

Mayor Rahm Emmanuel Administration

Mayor Rahm Emmanuel introduced significant reforms, building on the Daley administration's record.

- In 2012, the City Council made possession of less than 15g of marijuana a ticketing offense, advocating for it to become state law.
- In 2013, Emmanuel proposed allowing more organizations to contract out debt collection, specifically those that hire ex-offenders.
- In 2016, the City incentivized construction contractors to hire apprentices who had been previously incarcerated.
- The City expanded job programs for ex-offenders, doubled the number of re-entry centers, and increased enrollment in City Colleges.
- Emmanuel initiated a pilot program allowing a limited number of ex-felons to live in CHA housing.

By 2018, the city implemented several reentry initiatives aimed at facilitating the reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals into the workforce. These programs included:

- **Case-by-Case Evaluation of Criminal Records:** The city adopted a policy permitting individualized assessments of criminal convictions during the hiring process.
- **Greencorps Chicago:** A nine-month training program focused on environmental stewardship and landscaping skills, designed to equip participants with marketable competencies in sustainable practices.
- **Department of Fleet and Facility Management Initiatives:** This includes an established automotive repair training track initiated in 2004, aimed at developing technical skills in vehicle maintenance.
- **Call Center Operations and Debt Collection Training:** Programs designed to equip individuals with skills pertinent to customer service and financial recovery sectors.
- **Neighborhood Beautification and Recycling Programs:** Launched in 2005, these initiatives provided hands-on opportunities to engage in community enhancement and waste management practices. This was followed by the introduction of Cleanslate in 2006, which further emphasized restorative community efforts.

Customized Work Services Program: Established in 2004, this program offers temporary, transitional employment opportunities coupled with skill development, facilitating the transition of participants into stable employment. These programs collectively represent a strategic approach to decreasing recidivism and enhancing employability among formerly incarcerated individuals (IBID, 2018).

Mayor Lori Lightfoot Administration

Like her two predecessors, Lori Lightfoot grappled with the dual pressures of implementing a firm approach to crime and reforming policing, all while striving to support Chicago's population of returning citizens. In 2021, Mayor Lightfoot launched her City Working Group on Returning Residents, addressing the question of how the City can enhance its efforts and how various City agencies can collaborate more effectively to facilitate reentry. This initiative culminated in the formation of the Interagency Reentry Council (Roadmap, 2021).

The Chicago Department of Family and Support Services operates Community Reentry Support Centers designed to facilitate the reintegration of ex-offenders into the community. These centers provide specialized resources to help individuals achieve self-sufficiency. The services offered include workforce training programs, housing assistance, health care services, food security initiatives, and tailored support based on individual needs. Dedicated staff members are available to guide clients through these resources effectively, promoting successful pathways to reintegration.

Mayor Brandon Johnson has articulated a progressive paradigm for justice reform and reentry, emphasizing the necessity of addressing the systemic root causes of poverty and violence instead of solely expanding policing efforts. In 2023, he launched the SPRING Forward initiative, a collaborative reentry program developed in partnership with the Lawndale Christian Legal Center and Cara Collective. This program targets critical areas such as housing and employment navigation, thereby reinforcing the city's dedication to rehabilitation, community reintegration, and the objective of reducing recidivism rates (Nov 1, 2023, Office of the Mayor).

In 2021, in partnership with Cook County's Justice Advisory Council (JAC), The Partnership established the Cook County Coordinated Reentry

Council, which conducted an extensive eight-month series of convenings. This process culminated in the formulation of key recommendations aimed at enhancing the systemic framework of the region's reentry system:

- **Pre-release Skills Assessment:** Implement a comprehensive assessment protocol prior to release to accurately gauge individual needs in conjunction with employment and educational objectives.
- **Continuum of Services:** Develop an integrated continuum of care that commences during the pre-release phase and extends seamlessly into the community post-release.
- **Access to Technology:** Enhance both pre- and post-release access to technological resources as a means to support reintegration efforts.
- **Occupational Training Awareness:** Promote awareness and accessibility of occupational training programs, as well as clearly defined career pathways, for individuals re-entering the community.
- **Best Practice Implementation:** Integrate best practices gleaned from demonstration projects into the public workforce system to optimize service delivery and outcomes for individuals in the reentry process.

Cook County government has implemented two significant housing initiatives aimed at improving accessibility and support for individuals with criminal histories.

- **The 2019 Cook County Just Housing Amendment** prohibits housing discrimination based solely on an individual's criminal record. This policy requires that eligibility be assessed initially before conducting a thorough, individualized evaluation.
- In 2023, Cook County introduced a \$23 million, three-year program that provides housing vouchers along with wrap-around services specifically designed for individuals

reintegrating into society after incarceration. This initiative is funded through the American Rescue Plan (Injustice Watch, 2023).

In parallel, Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart has made concerted efforts to reduce the population of the Cook County Jail. In alignment with trends observed at the state level, the daily inmate count in the jail has plummeted from over 11,000 in 2013 to approximately 4,500 in 2024. This reduction has been achieved primarily through revising bail requirements and increasing reliance on electronic monitoring. It's important to note that a significant number of these individuals may not be classified as "reentering" since many are held in the jail while awaiting trial, with outcomes that may not lead to further incarceration. Additionally, some defendants have their charges dismissed, or they may enter plea agreements that do not result in incarceration beyond their initial arrest.

The Current System

As a result of this effort, the current Illinois/Chicago service and support system includes:

- **CURRENT Re-entry eco-system**
- **IMAN, Chicago Cred, Contextos Green Reentry**
- **Chicago Coalition for the Homeless Reentry Project**
- **Safer, Westside Health Authority, Safe Haven, CGLA, Heartland Alliance, CRS, JARC, CARA**
- **CTA Second Chance Program.**

APPENDIX B: FAIR CHANCE EMPLOYMENT AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS

Employment can provide stability and opportunities for those reentering society after involvement with the criminal justice system. However, many struggle to reintegrate into the job market after incarceration due to challenges, including limited skills, employers' reluctance to hire people with criminal records, and difficulties related to unstable housing, unreliable transportation, or mental health issues. Enhancing employment opportunities for these individuals with criminal records can help them reintegrate successfully, reduce recidivism rates, and increase public safety.

When individuals successfully reintegrate into society through stable, gainful employment, their likelihood of reoffending diminishes significantly. Unfortunately, many communities are ill-equipped to provide the necessary resources and support systems to assist offenders during this crucial time of transition. Research indicates that more than 50% of those with a criminal history do not report any earnings in the year following their release, underscoring the urgent need for effective support systems and job readiness programs that can empower these individuals and foster more resilient, safer communities.

This section situates the findings from North Lawndale within the broader policy landscape, highlighting the evolution of Fair Chance laws at the federal, state, and local levels, and underscoring their direct relevance to the success of reentry and workforce equity initiatives such as those led by NLEN.

A. Introduction

Employment is among the strongest predictors of successful reentry, and the lack of it is one of the most consistent drivers of recidivism. Yet, for decades, policies and employer practices have systematically excluded individuals with criminal records from the labor market.

The Fair Chance Employment movement - often framed under the phrase "Ban the Box" - seeks to change that reality by ensuring that applicants with conviction histories are evaluated on their qualifications first, not their past. In Illinois, Chicago, and across the United States, these policies have begun to shift hiring culture, create pathways to employment, and redefine what community safety means in practice.

B. Historical Context: From Punishment to Opportunity

The punitive sentencing trends of the 1980s and 1990s left a lasting imprint on the American labor market. Millions of individuals - disproportionately Black and Latino - were incarcerated under mandatory minimums and "three strikes" statutes.

Upon release, many faced permanent barriers to employment, as employers routinely disqualified applicants based on their criminal record(s). The result was a "prison to poverty pipeline" that trapped entire communities in cycles of unemployment and reincarceration.

Research from the Great Cities Institute and other policy centers shows that exclusionary hiring practices have long-term economic consequences:

- Nationally, people with felony convictions lose an estimated **\$370 billion** in annual earnings potential (Schmitt & Warner, 2010).
- In Illinois, more than 3.3 million residents - about one in four adults - have a criminal record that can appear in background checks (Illinois Sentencing Policy Advisory Council, 2022).

The rise of the Fair Chance movement represents a paradigm shift: employment is now viewed not just as a matter of economic opportunity, but also as a matter of racial justice, public safety, and community health.

The U.S. economy has historically marginalized individuals with justice system involvement from the workforce. Although some Fortune 500 companies support Fair-Chance Employment, many others remain reluctant to hire candidates with criminal records. This reluctance leads to high unemployment rates among these individuals, which contributes to persistent cycles of poverty and increases the likelihood of reincarceration.

Excluding individuals with criminal records from employment opportunities has a notable and disproportionate impact on racial minority applicants, principally due to their higher incarceration rates in the United States. According to The Sentencing Project, Black individuals are incarcerated in state prisons at a rate nearly three times greater than that of their White counterparts, while Latino individuals are incarcerated at a rate 1.3 times higher than that of their White peers. Employers can support justice-impacted workers with personalized accommodations, such as transportation and flexible schedules for meetings with parole officers. Many justice-impacted employees often struggle to access employee assistance programs; therefore, successful second-chance employers often hire dedicated staff, including social workers and

life coaches, who provide essential support and guidance, enabling these employees to succeed.

To effectively implement the second-chance model, it is essential to reconceptualize support initiatives as strategic investments rather than mere expenditures. This perspective highlights the potential of individuals who want to show that their past mistakes do not define their future contributions. By framing support as an investment, stakeholders can target programs and resources to foster an environment that ultimately benefits not only the individuals involved but also the broader community.

C. The Emergence in Illinois of “Ban the Box” and Fair Chance Policies

“Ban the Box” policies began at the local level in the early 2000s, led by advocacy organizations and reentry coalitions demanding fair access to employment. Ban the Box policies prohibit employers from inquiring about an applicant’s criminal history on job applications and defer background checks to later in the hiring process. The “box” refers to the yes/no checkbox that many employers traditionally included to ask if candidates had ever been convicted of a crime. “Ban the Box” refers to removing the checkbox on job applications that asks whether applicants have ever been convicted of a crime.

Many jurisdictions have expanded their Ban the Box policies to include Fair Chance legislation, designed to promote fair hiring practices and prevent discrimination based on past convictions. Such legislation typically prohibits employers from inquiring about a candidate’s criminal history during the initial stages of the hiring process, thereby allowing individuals to present their qualifications and skills without the stigma of their past. Fair Chance laws aim to create a more inclusive workforce by reducing barriers to employment and helping reintegrate formerly incarcerated individuals into society, contributing to reduced recidivism rates and stronger communities.

By 2024:

- 37 states and over 150 cities and counties have adopted Ban the Box or Fair Chance hiring laws aimed at removing employment barriers for qualified individuals with criminal records. Illinois became an early adopter in 2014, extending Ban the Box to private employers in 2015 under the Job Opportunities for Qualified Applicants Act.

Ban the Box policies prohibit employers from inquiring about an applicant's criminal history on job applications and defer background checks to later in the hiring process. The "box" refers to the yes/no checkbox that many employers traditionally included to ask if candidates had ever been convicted of a crime. Currently, 37 states and over 150 cities and counties have implemented measures aimed at removing employment barriers for qualified individuals with criminal records. Among these jurisdictions, 15 states, the District of Columbia, and 21 cities and counties have extended fair chance hiring policies to include private employers, ensuring greater employment opportunities for those impacted by the justice system.

- In 2021, the Illinois Human Rights Act was amended to prohibit discrimination based on criminal records unless there is a "substantial relationship" between the conviction and the job sought.

On March 23, 2021, Illinois Governor Pritzker signed legislation that expanded the Illinois Human Rights Act to prohibit employment discrimination based on criminal records. This law prevents employers, employment agencies, and labor organizations from denying employment or taking adverse action against individuals due to their conviction records, except in the following circumstances:

- When a substantial relationship exists between the criminal offense and the specific job, or

- When hiring, the individual would pose a public safety risk.

A "substantial relationship" means the job could enable a similar offense. Employers must consider factors like the time since the conviction and any evidence of rehabilitation. If an adverse action is planned, the employer must provide written notice and an opportunity for the employee to respond.

When making these assessments, employers must consider factors such as the amount of time that has passed since the conviction and any evidence of rehabilitation. If an employer decides to take negative action, they must notify the individual in writing and give them an opportunity to respond. If the final decision is influenced by the individual's conviction record, the employer must explain why, outline any available appeal options, and inform the individual of their right to file a complaint with the Department of Human Rights.

- The Federal Fair Chance Act (2021) extended similar provisions to federal agencies and contractors.

The Fair Chance to Compete for Jobs Act, commonly referred to as the Fair Chance Act, prohibits federal agencies and their contractors from inquiring about an applicant's criminal history before offering a conditional job offer. The Act aims to provide fair employment opportunities by focusing on qualifications and skills. It helps to level the playing field for individuals with arrest or conviction records, giving them a genuine opportunity to secure employment within federal agencies and promoting a more equitable labor market.

Together, these reforms reflect a bipartisan consensus that access to employment is key to reducing recidivism and strengthening local economies.

D. Illinois' Policy Landscape

Illinois is widely recognized as a national leader in reentry and fair employment reform. Its policy architecture integrates multiple dimensions of equity and rehabilitation:

1. Job Opportunities for Qualified Applicants Act (2015)

- Prohibits private employers with 15 or more employees from inquiring about an applicant's criminal history until after an interview or a conditional job offer has been extended.
- Enforcement authority lies with the Illinois Department of Labor.

2. Illinois Human Rights Act (2021 Amendment)

- Prohibits employment discrimination based on conviction history unless a clear, job-related justification exists.
- Requires employers to conduct individualized assessments that consider rehabilitation evidence, the time since conviction, and job duties.

3. Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC)

The Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) is a federal tax incentive for employers who recruit individuals from ten specified target groups, including those who are eligible ex-offenders. This program aims to mitigate tax liabilities for businesses while fostering inclusive and equitable employment practices within the labor market.

- Offers federal tax credits up to \$9,600 per hire to employers who hire individuals with conviction histories.
- Encourages employer participation in reentry hiring while reducing financial risk.

4. Cannabis Regulation and Tax Act (2020)

- Decriminalized cannabis and established mechanisms to expunge low-level convictions.
- Directs a portion of cannabis tax revenue to the R3 Program (Restore, Reinvest, Renew), which

funds reentry and community development initiatives in disproportionately impacted neighborhoods, such as North Lawndale.

5. Clean Slate and Sealing Reforms

- Illinois allows record sealing for most non-violent felonies after three years of completed sentence.
- The Illinois Supreme Court's 2022 ruling in *People v. Daniels* reaffirmed the right to employment as part of rehabilitation and reintegration.

E. Public Support for Reform

Public opinion data reveal broad bipartisan support for Fair Chance policies. According to a 2016 statewide poll conducted by the Illinois Policy Institute:

- 83% of respondents agreed that "you can be tough on crime and support reform."
- 79% supported giving people with records "a second chance through employment."
- 64% favored incentives for employers who hire justice-involved individuals.

Table 14: Public Attitudes to Criminal Justice Reform

Measure	Percent Agreeing
You can be tough on crime and also support reform	83%
Prisons should primarily be used for violent offenders	74%
Want to reduce the number of nonviolent offenders in prison	83%
Support drug treatment over incarceration for drug users	82%
Favor increasing the felony theft threshold	74%
Prefer judicial discretion instead of mandatory minimums	88%

Measure	Percent Agreeing
Support expanding Adult Redeploy eligibility	86%
More likely to vote for a candidate who supports lowering prison population	53% (less likely 9%)
More likely to vote for candidates who support removing barriers to occupational licensing	46% (less likely 13%)
More likely to vote for candidates who support sealing reform	40% (less likely 16%)

Source: Illinois Policy Institute Poll: Robust Support for Criminal-Justice Reform. Bryant Jackson-Green Summer, 2016.

Public opinion reflects the emerging consensus among business leaders: that a stable and inclusive workforce is vital to economic recovery, and that second-chance hiring is both a moral and practical imperative.

F. Implementation and Remaining Challenges

While legal frameworks have improved, practical implementation remains uneven. Many employers remain uncertain about compliance, and others maintain informal screening practices that continue to exclude applicants with records.

Key implementation challenges include:

- **Employer Education:** Businesses need clearer guidance on assessing rehabilitation, risk, and job relevance.
- **Data Transparency:** State and local governments must track Fair Chance outcomes to assess compliance and impact.
- **Cultural Change:** Reducing stigma around criminal records requires sustained leadership and public messaging.

Chicago has taken notable steps toward implementation:

- The City of Chicago's Department of Human Resources revised its hiring process to comply with Fair Chance standards for all municipal positions.
- The Cook County Workforce Partnership has incorporated reentry populations into sector-based workforce initiatives.
- Programs such as Chicago: One Workforce and Hire 360 integrate employer outreach with equity goals.

Yet, for these reforms to achieve full potential, they must be paired with wraparound supports - housing, healthcare, transportation, and case management - that make sustained employment feasible.

G. Fair Chance in Practice: The Role of Community-Based Organizations

NLEN is committed to improving the job prospects and lives of low-income individuals by implementing a range of targeted employment strategies that integrate structured employment experiences. These strategies include apprenticeships and work-based learning, with case management and support services. This multifaceted approach facilitates a smoother transition to stable, unsubsidized employment. Through its commitment to empowering low-income populations, NLEN equips individuals with the skills and support they need to achieve lasting economic stability and improved quality of life.

Community organizations like NLEN operationalize Fair Chance policies at the ground level. By bridging returning citizens and employers, they transform policy intent into measurable outcomes.

NLEN's partnerships with major institutions - including Chicago Transit Authority, Rush University Medical Center, and Northwestern Medicine -

demonstrate that Fair Chance employment can align with business needs while promoting equity.

These organizations play several critical roles:

1. **Employer Intermediation:** Educating and preparing employers to implement Fair Chance principles effectively.

2. **Job Readiness and Retention Support:** Providing soft skills, financial coaching, and cognitive-behavioral training to ensure long-term job success.
3. **Policy Feedback Loop:** Offering data and case studies that inform policy refinements and demonstrate cost-effectiveness.

H. The Economic Case for Fair Chance Hiring

Beyond social justice, Fair Chance employment represents sound economic policy. Analysis by the Prison Policy Initiative (2022) shows that reducing unemployment among formerly incarcerated individuals by just 1% yields an estimated \$1.7 billion increase in annual GDP.

Employers who engage in second-chance hiring report higher retention and loyalty among justice-involved workers. These outcomes result in lower turnover costs and increased workforce stability, particularly in industries facing chronic labor shortages, such as logistics, construction, and manufacturing.

Fair Chance Hiring policies remove unnecessary barriers to employment for individuals with criminal records, ensuring that applicants are evaluated on their qualifications before background checks are considered. These policies advance equity, strengthen the workforce, and reduce recidivism—turning reentry into opportunity rather than a return to incarceration.

- **Employment Reduces Recidivism:** Stable employment within one year of release reduces the likelihood of reoffending by over 50%, thereby lowering costs associated with reincarceration and enhancing public safety.
- **Economic Impact:** In Illinois, nearly one in four adults has a record that can appear in a background check. Fair Chance practices expand the labor pool, fill labor shortages, and boost local economies.
- **Public Support:** 83% of Illinois voters agree that “you can be tough on crime and support reform.”

- **Employer Benefits:** Companies that adopt Fair Chance policies report higher employee retention, stronger morale, and reputation gains tied to corporate social responsibility.

Policy Context

- 37 states and 150+ cities have enacted Fair Chance or “Ban the Box” laws.
- Illinois’ Job Opportunities for Qualified Applicants Act (2015) and the Illinois Human Rights Act (2021 amendment) prohibit discrimination based solely on criminal history unless job-related.
- The Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) incentivizes employers to hire returning citizens through federal tax credits up to \$9,600 per hire.

In communities like North Lawndale, Fair Chance Hiring transforms public safety into economic policy. Partnering with the North Lawndale Employment Network, returning citizens gain access to career training, transitional jobs, and supportive services that have reduced recidivism to under 8%—compared with the statewide rate of 36–52%.

Policy Implications

1. Integrate Fair Chance standards into all city and state procurement and contracting processes.
2. Expand employer education and certification programs to encourage compliance and transparency.
3. Strengthen data tracking and reporting to measure Fair Chance outcomes across industries.
4. Pair Fair Chance policies with investments in workforce development, housing, and behavioral health supports.

Fair Chance Hiring is both a smart policy and sound economics. It restores dignity, unlocks untapped talent, and delivers measurable returns for individuals, employers, and communities. Investing in

Fair Chance implementation is an investment in safer, stronger, and more equitable cities.

I. Policy Recommendations

1. Codify Fair Chance compliance at all levels of government procurement - state and municipal contracts should include reentry hiring targets.
2. Expand WOTC and R3 funding for employers who demonstrate measurable Fair Chance outcomes.
3. Establish public recognition programs for exemplary Fair Chance employers.
4. Integrate Fair Chance hiring into broader workforce and economic development plans - treating reentry employment not as charity but as a pillar of inclusive growth.
5. Enhance cross-sector data collection to evaluate outcomes and refine programs in real time.

J. Summary

Illinois' leadership in Fair Chance employment offers a model for the nation. Through legislative reform, public-private partnerships, and community-based innovation, the state is redefining public safety around opportunity rather than punishment.

Yet the task remains unfinished. Only through sustained coordination among state agencies, employers, and organizations like NLEN can Fair Chance hiring evolve from policy mandate to social norm.

Fair Chance Hiring policies represent a proven, evidence-based strategy for expanding workforce participation, reducing recidivism, and promoting equitable economic growth. By ensuring that individuals with criminal records are evaluated on their qualifications first—rather than excluded at the outset—these policies transform lives and strengthen local economies.

Research consistently demonstrates that employment is the single most important factor in successful

reentry. Individuals who secure stable work within the first year of release are half as likely to reoffend, saving millions in public costs associated with reincarceration. In Illinois, where nearly one in four adults has a record that can appear in a background check, removing unnecessary employment barriers expands the available labor pool, fills persistent job vacancies, and restores economic potential.

For communities like North Lawndale, Fair Chance policies are not only about second chances—they are about economic inclusion and public safety. Employers who adopt these practices report higher worker retention and improved morale, while neighborhoods benefit from reduced crime and stronger family stability.

State and local governments play a critical role by codifying Fair Chance standards into procurement, licensing, and workforce programs. When paired with community-based reentry supports—like those provided by NLEN—Fair Chance Hiring transforms reentry from a revolving door into a sustainable pathway to prosperity.

In short, Fair Chance policies work: they restore dignity, expand opportunity, and deliver measurable returns for individuals, employers, and the state alike.



APPENDIX C: HEALTH ACCESS AND EQUITY, HEALTH DISPARITIES AND FURTHER NORTH LAWDALE DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

A. Persistent Health Inequities Reflect Structural Disinvestment and Racialized Barriers to Care

African American residents on Chicago's West Side, including North Lawndale, experience profound and persistent health inequities rooted in structural racism, economic exclusion, and decades of disinvestment in Black neighborhoods. Despite proximity to major medical institutions, health outcomes for North Lawndale residents remain significantly worse than those of residents in more affluent and predominantly white areas of Chicago.

These inequities manifest across nearly all health domains - life expectancy, chronic disease, maternal and infant health, mental health, and violence-related mortality - indicating that access alone is insufficient without culturally responsive care, affordability, and attention to the social determinants of health.

The goal of addressing health disparities in North Lawndale is to achieve health equity. Health equity aims to guarantee that individuals do not lose the opportunity to achieve good healthcare because they belong to a socially, politically, or economically disadvantaged group. Facilitating optimal health for all residents of North Lawndale requires a thorough understanding of the factors that influence health outcomes, which requires meaningful data that encompasses a wide range of social determinants affecting health at the community level, particularly for vulnerable populations.

Addressing social determinants of health requires a structured approach to identify and mitigate factors such as socioeconomic status, access to education, and environmental influences that hinder optimal health outcomes. This approach ensures that underlying factors contributing to health disparities are systematically screened and addressed, facilitating a more equitable healthcare framework.

Factors that influence the health and well-being of various demographic groups in North Lawndale highlight the interplay of social, economic, and environmental factors that shape health outcomes and underscores the importance of analyzing the disparities observed among different populations in North Lawndale. Much of the neighborhood-level health data supplementing the analysis below is represented in Table 19 from Appendix D and comes from the Chicago Health Atlas.

Social Determinants of Health

Adverse health outcomes are frequently influenced by fundamental social and economic determinants, including factors related to social conditions that significantly impact health outcomes, with adverse effects stemming from issues such as poverty, lack of stable housing, food insecurity, unemployment, and community violence. These factors contribute to the overall health disparities observed in various populations, necessitating a comprehensive approach to public health interventions. These factors collectively contribute to the broader landscape of

health disparities and inequities, underscoring the necessity for a comprehensive approach to public health that addresses the root causes of ill health within populations.

Health Equity Requires Addressing Social Determinants of Health

Achieving health equity in North Lawndale requires recognizing that health outcomes are shaped by social, economic, and environmental conditions beyond clinical care. Key determinants influencing poor health outcomes include:

- High poverty and unemployment rates
- Housing instability and food insecurity
- Exposure to community violence and trauma
- Limited access to affordable, culturally competent healthcare
- Structural barriers tied to race, income, and insurance status

Without systematic interventions addressing these underlying conditions, disparities in health access and outcomes will persist.

Life Expectancy Reveals One of Chicago's Deepest Health Divides

Life expectancy in North Lawndale starkly illustrates Chicago's racial and geographic health inequities (Table 19).

- Residents of West Side neighborhoods have life expectancies nearly 20 years shorter than those in more affluent downtown areas.
- As of 2023, life expectancy in North Lawndale was 67.9 years, compared to 78.7 years citywide.

These disparities reflect cumulative disadvantage driven by chronic stress, limited preventive care, environmental exposure, and unequal access to economic opportunity.

Chronic Disease and Mortality Rates Remain Alarming High

North Lawndale experiences disproportionately high rates of chronic illness and premature mortality:

- Hypertension and obesity prevalence among Black residents is roughly double that of white residents.
- Diabetes mortality rates for Black residents exceed those of non-Black residents by approximately 70% (Table 19).
- All-cause mortality rates in North Lawndale far exceed Chicago averages, driven by cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, and diet-related conditions.

These outcomes underscore the urgent need for preventive care, chronic disease management, and community-based health interventions.

Unmet Health Care Needs Reflect Economic Barriers

Unmet healthcare needs remain a significant challenge, particularly due to cost:

- Approximately 25% of adults in North Lawndale report not obtaining needed prescription medications due to financial constraints (Table 19).
- Non-Hispanic Black adults report the highest unmet needs for medical care, dental services, vision care, and medications.
- While many residents report having a usual source of care, reliance on emergency departments remains high—signaling gaps in primary and preventive care access.

Mental Health Disparities Are Severe and Under-Resourced

Mental health inequities in North Lawndale are among the most acute health challenges facing the community (Table 19).

- Approximately 25% of adults report current symptoms consistent with PTSD.
- 17% exhibit symptoms of depression, compared to a national average of 7%.
- Black Chicagoans report higher mental health needs, yet only one-third receive adequate care.

North Lawndale has zero psychiatrists per 100,000 residents, compared to 47 citywide.

Systemic racism, community violence, historical trauma, stigma, and mistrust of healthcare institutions compound these disparities, while the shortage of culturally competent providers limits effective treatment.

Violence, Substance Use, and the Opioid Crisis Compound Health Risks

Public safety and behavioral health crises intersect to exacerbate poor health outcomes:

- Firearm-related homicide rates in North Lawndale are nearly four times the city average.
- Opioid overdose mortality among Black residents is more than three times higher than among non-Black populations.
- Drug-induced mortality rates substantially exceed citywide levels.

These patterns highlight the need for integrated public health, violence prevention, and harm-reduction strategies.

Maternal and Infant Health Outcomes Signal Deep Inequities

Maternal and infant health disparities remain a critical concern in North Lawndale:

- Black infants are nearly three times more likely to die in their first year of life than non-Black infants.
- Approximately one-third of births are preterm, significantly increasing health risks for infants and mothers.

These outcomes reflect gaps in prenatal care, chronic stress exposure, and systemic inequities in maternal health services.

Community Capacity Exists but Requires Sustained Investment

Several organizations are actively working to advance health equity on the West Side, including:

- Wellness West, a coalition of over 40 providers addressing mental and physical health needs.

- Bobby E. Wright Comprehensive Behavioral Health Center, offering crisis care services.
- CTSHealth, providing outpatient mental health services.
- West Side Health Equity Collaborative, formed to expand access to culturally responsive care.

While these initiatives represent critical assets, scale and coordination remain insufficient relative to the level of need.

Strategic Framework for Advancing Health Equity

This report advances recommendations across four interconnected domains:

- **People:** Strengthen workforce diversity, leadership, and cultural competence.
- **Organization:** Align internal policies and practices with health equity goals.
- **Patients:** Improve patient experience, safety, outcomes, and equity measurement.
- **Community:** Deepen engagement, investment, and cross-sector collaboration.

Conclusions on Health Disparities:

Health disparities in North Lawndale are not inevitable but are the result of long-standing structural inequities. Addressing them requires sustained, place-based investment; culturally responsive healthcare; integration of social determinants into health strategies; and strong partnerships between healthcare systems, community organizations, and public agencies.

Advancing health equity in North Lawndale is essential not only to improving individual health outcomes but also to strengthening community stability, economic opportunity, and overall quality of life.

B. Deep Disparities Exist in Mental Access and Outcomes

A deeper dive into mental health indicators reveal that persistent racial inequities and decades of disinvestment have produced deep disparities in mental health access and outcomes for African

Americans living in North Lawndale and Chicago's West Side. Data reveal systemic gaps in services and outcomes that directly affect community well-being and employment readiness.

Access Gaps and Provider Shortage

- North Lawndale had only 187.2 mental health providers per 100,000 residents in 2024, compared with 565.2 citywide, and no practicing psychiatrists, versus 47 per 100,000 in Chicago overall (Table 19).
- Residents faced 83.5% unmet mental-health treatment need in 2023-2024 among those with moderate or serious psychological distress, compared to 74.8% citywide; for serious distress, the rate rises to 98.5% (Table 19).
- These shortages reflect systemic underinvestment and spatial inequity in health infrastructure.

Prevalence of Mental Health Conditions

- One in six adults in 2015-2016 in North Lawndale reported symptoms of depression; 16% had diagnosed depressive symptoms..
- Anxiety symptoms affected approximately 16% of residents in 2015-2016, and PTSD symptoms affected 27% of women and 21% of men—rates nearly three times higher than national averages.
- 25% of adults reported PTSD symptoms in 2015-2016, and 17% reported depression, compared to national depression averages of 7%.

Racial and Gender Disparities

- In 2015-2016 among non-Hispanic Black residents nationally, 11% of men and 16% of women report current depression symptoms—higher than U.S. averages for both sexes.
- In North Lawndale, rates of anxiety and PTSD among Black women were among the highest in Chicago.

Behavioral Health and Substance Use

- Opioid-related overdoses: 522 EMS responses in 2023, reflecting a mortality rate of 128 deaths per 100,000, compared to 37.6 for Chicago overall.

- Prescription opiate misuse affects 10.7% of adults—over three times the city rate.
- Drug-induced mortality in North Lawndale (156 per 100,000) in 2019-2023 is more than triple the Chicago average (43.5).

Broader Behavioral Health Indicators

- Self-reported poor mental health: 22.5% in North Lawndale versus 16.6% citywide in 2022.
- Adult binge drinking: 35.2% of adults in 2023-2024, slightly higher than Chicago's 33.3%.
- Alcohol-induced mortality: 15.1 per 100,000 in 2019-2023, compared to 11.3 citywide.

Social Determinants and Historical Context

- Systemic racism, concentrated poverty, gun violence, and intergenerational trauma drive higher mental-health risks.
- A long history of mistrust toward healthcare institutions discourages many residents from seeking treatment.
- Stigma around mental illness within the community remains a major barrier to care.
- A shortage of culturally competent providers limits the effectiveness of treatment and prevention efforts.

Equity Implications for Policy and Practice

- Addressing mental-health inequities is central to improving employment readiness, workforce participation, and community safety.
- NLEN's holistic approach—which integrates cognitive behavioral therapy, trauma-informed care, and employment training—offers a model for bridging health and economic systems.
- Investments in culturally competent care, community mental-health infrastructure, and integrated reentry programs are essential to achieving racial and mental-health equity on Chicago's West Side.

C. Further Demographic Data on North Lawndale

1. Household Size and Family Structure and Household Composition

Family structure, as indicated by average household size (AHS), provides valuable insights into societal dynamics and trends in living arrangements. A household is defined as one or more individuals living together in a housing unit. It is often measured using the persons-per-household (PPH), which indicates the number of individuals residing in a unit, which can include a single-family home, an apartment, or shared spaces. Persons-per-household captures the composition of households, including the mix of adults, children, and elderly residents, and provides essential insights into shifts in societal norms, such as the rise of smaller family units, an increase in the number of single-person households, and a greater acceptance of communal living. In addition, the average household size is a critical indicator of the underlying demand for community resources, such as food, housing, education, and healthcare, reflecting broader economic and social conditions within a community.

Table 9 presents a comparison of the average household sizes of occupied housing units between North Lawndale and the broader city of Chicago. In 2000, the average household size in North Lawndale was 2.67, while Chicago's average was higher at 3.22. From 2008 to 2012, North Lawndale experienced an increase in its average household size to 3.30, while Chicago experienced a decrease to 2.57. Between 2018 and 2022, the average household size in North Lawndale decreased to 2.50, compared to Chicago's slightly lower average of 2.36. This data on household size dynamics is crucial for understanding the evolving social fabric of North Lawndale.

Table 15: Average Household Size of Occupied Housing Units, 2000, 2008-2012, and 2018-2022

Geography	2000	2008-2012	2018-2022
North Lawndale	2.67	3.30	2.50
Chicago	3.22	2.57	2.36

^a Source: Decennial Census (2000), American Community Survey 5-year Estimate (2008-2012, 2018-2022). Tabulations by Great Cities Institute.

The structure of households in North Lawndale reflects both economic hardship and social transformation. The proportion of single-parent households, particularly female-headed households with children under 18, remains high compared to city averages.

In 2000, 56.2% of households with children were headed by women, compared to 37.3% citywide. By 2018-2022, that share had declined modestly to 52.1%, but it remains substantially above Chicago's 33.5% (See Table 10).

High rates of single-parent households correspond to increased vulnerability to poverty and employment instability, particularly given childcare constraints and limited access to family-supportive employment opportunities.

Family structure data reveal the compounded nature of socioeconomic disadvantage in North Lawndale. Policy strategies that expand affordable childcare, family-supportive employment, and wraparound reentry services are essential to stabilizing households and enhancing labor market participation rates.

Table 16: Family Type by Presence and Age of Own Children Under 18 Years,
North Lawndale and Chicago, 2000 and 2018–2022

Family Type	2000		2018–2022	
	North Lawndale	Chicago	North Lawndale	Chicago
Married Couple Family	30.1%	49.4%	34.2%	50.3%
Female Householder, No Spouse Present	56.2%	37.3%	52.1%	33.5%
Male Householder, No Spouse Present	13.7%	13.3%	13.7%	16.2%

Data Source: Census Bureau (2000 Decennial Census, 2018–2022 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates). Tabulations by Great Cities Institute.

2. Age and Demographic Composition

North Lawndale’s demographic structure reveals a relatively young population, with a significant share of residents in prime working ages (25-44).

Table 17: Population by Age Cohort in North Lawndale compared to Chicago, 2000, 2008-2012, and 2018-2022

Age Level	2000		2008-2012		2018-2022		Change 2000-2022	
	North Lawndale	Chicago	North Lawndale	Chicago	North Lawndale	Chicago	North Lawndale	Chicago
Under 18	38.2% (15,949)	26.2% (759,840)	34.1% (11,472)	23.0% (622,317)	25.9% (7,867)	20.0% (543,411)	-50.7% (-8,082)	-28.5% (-216,429)
18-34	22.6% (9,444)	29.6% (856,909)	25.0% (8,404)	29.9% (808,769)	25.2% (7,656)	29.5% (802,675)	-18.9% (-1,788)	-6.3% (-54,234)
35-49	19.1% (7,971)	21.1% (611,072)	16.3% (5,497)	20.5% (553,769)	19.9% (6,052)	20.3% (552,647)	-24.1% (-1,919)	-9.6% (-58,425)
50-64	10.8% (4,517)	12.8% (369,392)	15.9% (5,366)	16.1% (434,468)	16.8% (5,095)	17.0% (462,033)	+12.8% (578)	+25.1% (92,641)
65 and over	9.3% (3,887)	10.3% (298,803)	8.6% (2,905)	10.5% (283,148)	12.3% (3,739)	13.3% (361,148)	-3.8% (-148)	+20.9% (62,345)
Total Population	41,768	2,296,016	33,644	2,702,471	30,409	2,721,914	-27.2% (-11,359)	-6.0% (-174,102)

Data Source: Census Bureau (2000 Decennial Census, 2008-2012, and 2018-2022 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates). Tabulations by Great Cities Institute.

However, there has been a gradual decline in population since 2000, consistent with broader patterns of outmigration from Chicago's West Side.

3. Educational Attainment

Educational attainment has improved steadily over the past two decades, yet significant disparities persist when compared to the city as a whole.

Between 2000 and 2018–2022, the share of residents without a high school diploma fell from 38.9% to 20.5%, a considerable improvement that

reflects investments in adult education and GED programming. However, only 9.7% of residents hold a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 24.4% citywide.

This gap in postsecondary achievement contributes to the persistence of low-wage employment and limited upward mobility. Programs that integrate adult education, apprenticeships, and employer-aligned credentials remain critical to building human capital in North Lawndale.

Table 18: Educational Attainment for Population 25+ Years in North Lawndale compared to Chicago, 2000, 2008-2012, and 2018-2022 Estimates)

Education Level	2000		2008-2012		2018-2022	
	North Lawndale	Chicago	North Lawndale	Chicago	North Lawndale	Chicago
Less than High School Diploma	38.9% (4,156)	28.2% (511,774)	28.1% (5,087)	19.4% (347,044)	20.5% (4,034)	13.3% (255,250)
High School Diploma or Equivalent	27.7% (2,961)	23.0% (418,113)	34.0% (6,133)	23.0% (410,437)	29.6% (5,805)	21.7% (414,395)
Some College, No Degree	22.0% (2,354)	18.7% (338,983)	23.3% (4,196)	18.4% (328,199)	26.0% (5,108)	16.7% (318,856)
Associate's Degree	3.1% (332)	4.6% (84,243)	4.3% (782)	5.5% (97,546)	8.6% (1,689)	5.8% (111,805)
Bachelor's Degree	6.3% (679)	15.5% (281,549)	6.9% (1,251)	20.1% (358,331)	9.7% (1,898)	24.4% (466,629)
Graduate or Professional Degree	2.0% (213)	10.0% (181,234)	3.2% (587)	13.5% (240,449)	5.6% (1,101)	18.0% (344,395)

Data Source: Census Bureau (2000 Decennial Census, 2008-2012, and 2018-2022 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates). Tabulations by Great Cities Institute.

These trends demonstrate progress toward educational parity, but they also underscore the continuing inequities that impede access to higher-wage employment. Investments in education-to-employment pipelines remain essential for economic resilience.

The neighborhood's age composition continues to reflect the impacts of incarceration and premature mortality, as well as youth outmigration in search of education and employment opportunities. These demographic pressures intensify the need for localized workforce investments and community retention initiatives.

APPENDIX D: HEALTH DATA IN NORTH LAWNDALE

African Americans on the West Side and North Lawndale neighborhoods of Chicago face significant barriers to receiving equitable healthcare. Significant racial disparities in access and outcomes persist for communities on Chicago's West Side, including North Lawndale. These disparities arise from a combination of systemic challenges, economic factors, and a historical lack of investment in Black neighborhoods. Consequently, Black residents often experience higher rates of poor health conditions while encountering substantial barriers to effective care. One major issue is the inadequate resources available for fewer mental health services in these predominantly Black areas compared to the more affluent, predominantly white neighborhoods on the North Side.

The goal of addressing health disparities in North Lawndale is to achieve health equity. Health equity aims to guarantee that individuals do not lose the opportunity to achieve good healthcare because they belong to a socially, politically, or economically disadvantaged group. Facilitating optimal health for all residents of North Lawndale requires a thorough understanding of the factors that influence health outcomes, which requires meaningful data that encompasses a wide range of social determinants affecting health at the community level, particularly for vulnerable populations.

Addressing social determinants of health requires a structured approach to identify and mitigate factors such as socioeconomic status, access to education, and environmental influences that hinder optimal health outcomes. This approach ensures that underlying factors contributing to health disparities are systematically screened and addressed, facilitating a more equitable healthcare framework.

This section provides an analysis of the factors that influence the health and well-being of various demographic groups in North Lawndale. It highlights

the interplay of social, economic, and environmental factors that shape health outcomes and underscores the importance of analyzing the disparities observed among different populations in North Lawndale. Therefore, it presents in-depth neighborhood-level health information.

Social Determinants of Health¹

Adverse health outcomes are frequently influenced by fundamental social and economic determinants, including factors related to social conditions that significantly impact health outcomes, with adverse effects stemming from issues such as poverty, lack of stable housing, food insecurity, unemployment, and community violence. These factors contribute to the overall health disparities observed in various populations, necessitating a comprehensive approach to public health interventions. These factors collectively contribute to the broader landscape of health disparities and inequities, underscoring the necessity for a comprehensive approach to public health that addresses the root causes of ill health within populations.

Life Expectancy

The life expectancy disparity in Chicago is starkly illustrated in the West Side neighborhoods, where residents have an average life expectancy of nearly 20 years less than their counterparts in more affluent downtown regions. This highlights significant health inequities influenced by socioeconomic factors and systemic disparities. Such differences call for a critical examination of the underlying factors contributing to this divide, including access to healthcare, economic opportunities, and social determinants of health.

Chronic Conditions and Mortality

The relationship between chronic health conditions and mortality rates reveals significant disparities in

life expectancy, particularly within Black communities. Opioid overdose fatalities, alongside prevalent chronic illnesses such as hypertension, emerge as critical factors contributing to this life expectancy gap. These findings underscore the critical need for targeted public health interventions to address these intertwined issues and promote health equity.

Unmet Health Care Needs

Unmet healthcare needs are a measure of inadequate access to healthcare. The decision to delay or forgo care is associated with poorer health outcomes. In North Lawndale, approximately 25% of adults reported not obtaining essential prescription medications primarily due to financial constraints. Non-Hispanic Black adults experienced the highest rates of unmet health care needs due to expenses related to medical care or surgery (13%), prescription medications (25%), dental services (25%), and eyeglasses (17%). These statistics highlight the disparities in healthcare access and the impact of economic barriers on health maintenance and improvement.

Utilization of Health Care

Effective utilization of healthcare services is crucial for enhancing health outcomes and reducing costs. Having a designated source of care significantly influences a variety of mental and physical health outcomes. Furthermore, it is crucial to examine emergency department (ED) visits, as high rates of ED utilization may indicate inadequate access to quality primary care services. In North Lawndale, over 90% of female residents reported having a designated source of care. However, it is concerning that nearly 50% of non-Hispanic Black adults accessed emergency rooms for personal health issues within the past year, indicating potential gaps in primary care access and preventive services.

Obstacles to Access

Significant barriers consist of limited access to healthcare and social support services, the expensive nature of care, a deficiency of Black mental health providers, and a considerable segment of the population lacking health insurance.

Access to Healthcare

Access to healthcare in North Lawndale, despite the presence of facilities such as Mt. Sinai and Cook County Hospital, has not resulted in improved health outcomes. This suggests that factors such as the quality of care provided, insurance coverage, and systemic biases inherent within the healthcare system significantly influence health outcomes in North Lawndale.

Key Disparities

Life Expectancy Disparities

A significant disparity exists in life expectancy among residents in different neighborhoods of Chicago. For instance, individuals residing in West Side areas, such as West Garfield Park, have a life expectancy that hovers around 66.6 years as of 2023.

Chronic Diseases/Chronic Disorders

The prevalence of hypertension and obesity in Black communities is approximately double that observed in white communities. Furthermore, mortality rates attributed to diabetes among Black individuals exceed those of their non-Black counterparts by 70%. This data underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions and policy reforms aimed at addressing these inequities in health outcomes.

Maternal and Infant Health

Maternal and Infant Health Disparities: Maternal and infant health disparities are a significant concern, particularly within the Black population. Research indicates that Black infants have a significantly higher risk of mortality in their first year of life, being almost three times more likely to die than their non-Black counterparts.

Research indicates that Black infants have a mortality rate that is nearly three times higher in their first year of life compared to their non-Black counterparts. In the specific context of North Lawndale, data reveals that approximately one-third of mothers experience premature births, underscoring the critical challenges faced in this community related to maternal and infant health outcomes.

The mortality rate for Black infants is approximately threefold higher in the first year of life compared to their non-Black counterparts. In the North Lawndale area, data indicates that roughly one-third of mothers have experienced preterm births.

Violence and Opioid Crisis

The disparities in violence and substance use disorders reveal significant public health challenges. Specifically, the homicide rate among Black individuals is approximately nine times greater than that of their non-Black individuals. The mortality rate from opioid overdoses within the Black population exceeds that of non-Black populations by over three times. This highlights a critical intersection of systemic factors that underscores the urgent need for targeted public health interventions and policy reforms to address these critical issues.

Mental Health

Significant racial disparities in mental healthcare access and outcomes persist for African American communities on Chicago's West Side, including North Lawndale. These disparities arise from a combination of systemic challenges, economic factors, and a historical lack of investment in Black neighborhoods. Consequently, Black residents often experience higher rates of mental health conditions while encountering substantial barriers to effective care.

African Americans in the West Side and North Lawndale neighborhoods of Chicago face significant barriers to receiving equitable mental healthcare. One major issue is the inadequate resources available in these predominantly Black areas, which offer far fewer mental health services compared to the more affluent, predominantly white neighborhoods on the North Side. This disparity is exacerbated by systemic racism and decades of disinvestment, leading to higher rates of chronic illnesses and mental health issues.

In North Lawndale, approximately 25% of the adult population exhibits current symptoms consistent with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), while 17% demonstrate indications of depressive disorders,

in contrast to the U.S. average of 7%. These statistics underscore the pressing need for targeted mental health interventions in this community.

Significant Mental Health Disparities

Higher Need, Lower Access: Black Chicagoans report higher rates of mental health issues but only one-third receive necessary support.

Systemic Racism and Trauma: Ongoing systemic racism, including police misconduct and community violence, negatively impacts mental health.

Lack of Resources: Historical underfunding and closures of community mental health clinics in Black and Brown neighborhoods worsen care disparities.

Stigma and Mistrust: Social stigma around mental health and mistrust in healthcare due to historical racism create barriers to care.

Underrepresentation of Providers: There is a shortage of culturally competent clinicians who understand the impact of systemic racism on mental health.

Organizations focused on improving mental health equity on the West Side

Wellness West: A coalition of over 40 healthcare providers addressing high rates of mental and physical illness.

Bobby E. Wright Comprehensive Behavioral Health Center: Offers a Crisis Care Center in Austin for mental health and substance abuse crises, aiming to divert individuals from emergency services.

CTSHHealth: Provides comprehensive outpatient mental healthcare at its West Side office on North Avenue.

West Side Health Equity Collaborative: Formed in 2021 to enhance access to culturally responsive healthcare and tackle health disparities.

Table 19: Health Data in North Lawndale¹:

Health insurance coverage ^{*(2)}		
Percent of adults aged 18-64 years without health insurance by community area*		
US: 13%	Chicago: 9.8% (0.2%)	North Lawndale: 13.7% (2.5%)
Percent of adults aged 18-64 years without health insurance by race/ethnicity*		
US: 13%	Chicago: 9.8% (0.2%)	Non-Hispanic Black: 12% (2.8%)
Percent of adults aged 18-64 years with private or public health insurance by community area ^{*(3)}		
United States	PRIVATE: 73%	PUBLIC: 21%
North Lawndale	PRIVATE: 22% (4.7%)	PUBLIC: 59% (5.7%)
Percent of adults aged 18-64 years with private or public health insurance by race/ethnicity ^{*(4)}		
United States	PRIVATE: 73%	PUBLIC: 21%
Non-Hispanic Black	PRIVATE: 24% (4.4%)	PUBLIC: 64% (4.0%)
Health care utilization*		
Percent with a usual place of health care by community area and sex*		
United States	MALE: 81%	FEMALE: 89%
North Lawndale	MALE: 84% (6.0%)	FEMALE: 93% (3.7%)
Percent with a usual place of health care by race/ethnicity and sex ^{*(5)}		
United States	MALE: 81%	FEMALE: 89%
Non-Hispanic Black	MALE: 80% (4.7%)	FEMALE: 96% (1.3%)
Percent with routine check-up in past year by community area and sex*		
North Lawndale	MALE: 66% (6.0%)	FEMALE: 84% (6.8%)
Percent with routine check-up in past year by race/ethnicity and sex ^{*(6)}		
Non-Hispanic Black	MALE: 63% (4.9%)	FEMALE: 84% (3.9%)
Percent who visited emergency room for own care in past year by community area and sex*		
United States	MALE: 17%	FEMALE: 20%
North Lawndale	MALE: 31% (7.2%)	FEMALE: 49% (8.0%)

Table 19 cont: Health Data in North Lawndale¹:

Percent who visited emergency room for own care in past year by race/ethnicity and sex ^{*[7]}		
United States	MALE: 17%	FEMALE: 20%
Non-Hispanic Black	MALE: 49% (5.0%)	FEMALE: 49% (5.2%)
Unmet health care needs*		
Percent who did not get needed medical care or surgery in past year due to cost by community area*		
North Lawndale	6% (2.4%)	
Percent who did not get needed medical care or surgery in past year due to cost by race/ethnicity ^{*[8]}		
Non-Hispanic Black	13% (2.5%)	
Uninsured Rate (% of Residents – 2019-2023)*		
North Lawndale: 13.69 (±2.47)	Chicago: 8.82 (±0.19)	
Employment-based health insurance (% of residents – 2019-2023)*		
North Lawndale: 32.00 (±4.09)	Chicago: 53.73 (±0.38)	
Resource Availability*		
Primary care provider rate (% of adults – 2023-2024)*		
North Lawndale: 89.8 (±5.9)	Chicago: 80.3 (±0.9)	
Primary Care Providers (PCP) per capita providers per 100,000 residents*		
North Lawndale: 249.1	Chicago: 107.7	
Routine checkup rate (% of adults – 2023-2024)*		
North Lawndale: 88.8 (±5.7)	Chicago: 76.4 (±1.0)	
Medicaid coverage (% of residents – 2019-2023)*		
North Lawndale: 45.37 (±5.04)	Chicago: 24.60 (±0.36)	
Uninsured rate (% of residents – 2019-2023)*		
North Lawndale: 13.69 (±2.47)	Chicago: 9.82 (±0.19)	
Overall health status - excellent, very good, good rate (% of adults – 2023-2024)*		
North Lawndale: 68.0 (±10.6)	Chicago: 86.1 (±0.08)	

Table 19 cont: Health Data in North Lawndale¹:

All-cause mortality rate per 100,000 population – (2019-2023)*		
North Lawndale: 1306.9 (±101.3)	Chicago: 776.8 (±7.9)	
Infant mortality rate per 1,000 live births – (2019-2023)*		
North Lawndale: 7.8	Chicago: 6.3	
General health status (Percent reporting fair or poor health status by community area and sex) *[9]		
United States	MALE: 12%	FEMALE: 13%
North Lawndale	MALE: 38% (8.5%)	FEMALE: 31% (7.1%)
General health status (Percent reporting fair or poor health status by race/ethnicity and sex)*[10]		
United States	MALE: 12%	FEMALE: 13%
Non-Hispanic Black	MALE: 36% (6.1%)	FEMALE: 32% (4.9%)
Obesity*[11]		
Prevalence of obesity by community area and sex*[12]		
United States	MALE: 30%	FEMALE: 29%
North Lawndale	MALE: 48% (10.5%)	FEMALE: 58% (5.0%)
Prevalence of obesity by race/ethnicity and sex*[13]		
United States	MALE: 30%	FEMALE: 29%
Non-Hispanic Black	MALE: 41% (5.1%)	FEMALE: 52% (4.4%)
Asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary Disease (COPD)*[14]		
Prevalence of current asthma by community area*[15]		
U.S.: 7%	Chicago: 9%	North Lawndale: 21% (3.7%)
Prevalence of current asthma by race/ethnicity and sex*[16]		
United States	MALE: 5%	FEMALE: 10%
Non-Hispanic Black	MALE: 16% (4.1%)	FEMALE: 24% (4.2%)
Prevalence of screened or diagnosed chronic obstructive pulmonary disease by community area*[17]		
North Lawndale	25% (5.9%)	
Non-Hispanic Black	35% (6.3%)	

Table 19 cont: Health Data in North Lawndale¹:

Prevalence of screened or diagnosed chronic obstructive pulmonary disease by race/ethnicity and sex^{*[18]}

Non-Hispanic Black	35% (6.3%)
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Cardiovascular disease*

Prevalence of diagnosed heart disease by community area*

North Lawndale: 13% (4.2%)

Prevalence of diagnosed heart disease by race/ethnicity and sex^{*[19]}

Non-Hispanic Black	Male: 8% (2.1%)	Female: 16% (3.2%)
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Prevalence of diagnosed heart disease by race/ethnicity and sex^{*[20]}

United States	MALE: 26%	FEMALE: 24%
North Lawndale	MALE: 27% (6.9%)	FEMALE: 45% (6.3%)

Prevalence of diagnosed high blood pressure by race/ethnicity and sex*

United States	MALE: 26%	FEMALE: 24%
Non-Hispanic Black	MALE: 28% (4.9%)	FEMALE: 43% (4.1%)

Prevalence of diagnosed high cholesterol by race/ethnicity and sex*

Male: 25% (4.1%)	Female: 27% (4.4%)
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Diabetes

Prevalence of diagnosed high cholesterol by race/ethnicity and sex*

United States	MALE: 9%	FEMALE: 8%
North Lawndale	MALE: 11% (7.2%)	FEMALE: 9% (2.1%)

Prevalence of diagnosed diabetes by race/ethnicity and sex*

United States	MALE: 9%	FEMALE: 8%
Non-Hispanic Black	MALE: 12% (3.5%)	FEMALE: 11% (2.2%)

Prevalence of diagnosed diabetes by race/ethnicity and sex*

North Lawndale: 43% (6.7%)

Percent with a family history of diabetes by race/ethnicity*

Non-Hispanic Black: 41% (4.2%)

Table 19 cont: Health Data in North Lawndale¹:

Percent with a family history of diabetes by race/ethnicity*		
Non-Hispanic Black: 41% (4.2%)		
Mental Health		
Percent with a family history of diabetes by race/ethnicity*		
North Lawndale: 3% (2.3%)		
Percent who did not get needed mental health care in past year due to cost by race/ethnicity*		
Non-Hispanic Black: 5% (1.5%)		
Mental health providers per capita providers per 100,000 residents (2024)**		
North Lawndale: 187.2	Chicago: 565.2	
Mental health providers per capita providers per 100,000 residents (2024)**		
North Lawndale: 0	Chicago: 47	
Prevalence of diagnosed depression by Community Area ^{[20]*}		
North Lawndale: 16% (4.6%)		
Prevalence of diagnosed depression by race/ethnicity and sex*		
United States	MALE: 11%	FEMALE: 21%
Non-Hispanic Black	MALE: 13% (3.2%)	FEMALE: 15% (2.8%) ^[21]
Prevalence of diagnosed depression by race/ethnicity and sex*		
North Lawndale: 17% (4.6%) ^[22]		
Prevalence of diagnosed depression by race/ethnicity and sex*		
United States	MALE: 5%	FEMALE: 8%
Non-Hispanic Black	MALE: 11% (2.6%)	FEMALE: 16% (3.4%)
Prevalence of current anxiety symptoms by community area*		
North Lawndale: 16% (5.6%)		
Prevalence of current anxiety symptoms by race/ethnicity and sex*		
Non-Hispanic Black:	Male: 10% (2.5%)	Female: 17% (3.6%)

Table 19 cont: Health Data in North Lawndale¹:

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)* ^[23]		
Prevalence of diagnosed post-traumatic stress disorder by community area		
North Lawndale: 9% (4.9%)		
Prevalence of diagnosed post-traumatic stress disorder by race/ethnicity*		
Non-Hispanic Black: 5% (1.5%)		
Prevalence of current post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms by community area and sex*		
North Lawndale	Male: 21% (9.3%)	Female: 27% (6.3%)
Prevalence of current post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms by community area and sex*		
Non-Hispanic Black:	Male: 19% (4.9%)	Female: 20% (3.8%)
Health Indicators (2024)**		
Behavioral Health		
Adult Loneliness Rate (Percent of Adults – 2023-2024)**		
North Lawndale: 28.3 (±8.5)		Chicago: 31.8 (±1.1)
Opioid-Related Overdoses (Count of EMS Responses – 2023)**		
North Lawndale: 522		Chicago: 10,007
Moderate or serious psychological distress rate % of adults – (2023-2024)**		
North Lawndale: 40.2 (±9.5)		Chicago: 47.9 (±1.1)
Serious psychological distress rate % of adults – (2023-2024)**		
North Lawndale: 11.7 (±6.3)		Chicago: 10.9 (±0.7)
Unmet mental health treatment need among moderate or serious psychological distress rate % of adults – (2023-2024)**		
North Lawndale: 83.5 (±11.4)		Chicago: 74.8 (±1.4)
Unmet mental health treatment need among serious psychological distress rate % of adults (2023-2024)**		
North Lawndale: 98.5 (±2.6)		Chicago: 64.4 (±3.4)
Opioid-related overdose mortality rate per 100,000 population – (2023)**		
North Lawndale: 128.0 (±86.6)	Chicago: 37.6 (±4.9)	
Self-reported poor mental health % of adults – (2022)**		
North Lawndale: 22.46 (±0.62)	Chicago: 16.60 (±1.30)	

Table 19 cont: Health Data in North Lawndale¹:

Health Behaviors: Alcohol & Drug Use**		
Adult binge drinking rate % of adults – (2023-2024)**		
North Lawndale: 35.2 (±10.3)	Chicago: 33.3 (±1.1)	
Prescription opiate misuse rate % of adults – (2023-2024)**		
North Lawndale: 10.7 (±6.2)	Chicago: 3.2 (±0.4)	
Mortality: Behavioral Health**		
Alcohol-induced mortality rate per 100,000 population – (2019-2023)**		
North Lawndale: 15.10 (±10.69)	Chicago: 11.30 (±0.99)	
Drug-induced mortality rate per 100,000 population – (2019-2023)**		
North Lawndale: 156.0 (±35.9)	Chicago: 43.5 (±2.1)	
Drug overdose mortality rate per 100,000 population – (2019-2023)**		
North Lawndale: 153.8 (±35.5)	Chicago: 42.6 (±2.0)	
Suicide mortality rate per 100,000 population – (2019-2023)**		
North Lawndale: 6.2 (±9.0)	Chicago: 8.0 (±1.0)	
Alcohol-induced mortality rate per 100,000 population – (2019-2023)**		
North Lawndale: 15.10 (±10.69)	Chicago: 11.30 (±0.99)	
Drug-induced mortality rate per 100,000 population (2019-2023)**		
North Lawndale: 156.0 (±35.9)	Chicago: 43.5 (±2.1)	
Drug overdose mortality rate per 100,000 population – (2019-2023)**		
North Lawndale: 153.8 (±35.5)	Chicago: 42.6 (±2.0)	
Suicide mortality rate per 100,000 population (2019-2023)**		
North Lawndale: 6.2 (±9.0)	Chicago: 8.0 (±1.0)	
Chronic Disease		
Female breast cancer mortality rate per 100,000 female population – (2019-2023)**		
North Lawndale: 33.5 (±18.6)	Chicago: 20.5 (±1.6)	
Cancer mortality rate per 100,000 population (2019-2023)**		
North Lawndale: 184.0 (±34.2)	Chicago: 139.0 (±3.0)	

Table 19 cont: Health Data in North Lawndale¹:

Coronary heart disease mortality rate per 100,000 population – (2019-2023)**		
North Lawndale: 91.8 (±23.5)	Chicago: 73.9 (±2.1)	
Diabetes		
Diabetes mortality rate per 100,000 population		
North Lawndale: 40.5 (±15.5)	Chicago: 24.4 (±1.3)	
Diet-related mortality rate per 100,000 population – (2019-2023)**		
North Lawndale: 385.5 (±49.2)	Chicago: 260.0 (±3.9)	
All-cause mortality rate per 100,000 population – (2019-2023)**		
North Lawndale: 1306.9 (±101.3)	Chicago: 776.8 (±7.9)	
Heart disease mortality rate per 100,000 population – (2019-2023)**		
North Lawndale: 253.1 (±40.8)	Chicago: 174.7 (±3.3)	
Stroke mortality rate per 100,000 population – (2019-2023)**		
North Lawndale: 70.4 (±20.6)	Chicago: 44.2 (±1.6)	
Injury & Violence		
Firearm-related homicide mortality rate per 100,000 population – (2019-2023)**		
North Lawndale: 73.9 (±21.2)	Chicago: 19.1 (±1.12)	
Homicide mortality rate per 100,000 population – (2019-2023)**		
North Lawndale: 83.5 (±22.7)	Chicago: 21.4 (±1.3)	
Maternal, Infant, Child, & Adolescent Health		
Infant mortality rate per 1,000 live births – (2019-2023)**		
North Lawndale: 7.8	Chicago: 6.3	
Quality of Life**		
Life expectancy (years 2023)		
North Lawndale: 67.9	Chicago: 78.7	
Average number of physically unhealthy days in past month by community area and sex ^{*(24)}		
United States	US MALE: 3.6	US FEMALE: 4.1
NORTH LAWNDALe:	MALE: 5.6 (1.4)	FEMALE: 3.0 (1.0)

Table 19 cont: Health Data in North Lawndale¹:

Average number of physically unhealthy days in past month by race/ethnicity and sex ^{*[25]}		
United States	US MALE: 3.6	US FEMALE: 4.1
Non-Hispanic Black	MALE: 4.4 (0.7)	FEMALE: 3.7 (0.6)
Infant Health ^{*[26]}		
Percent of females who ever had a baby born prematurely by community area ^{*[27]}		
North Lawndale: 32% (10.1%)		
Percent of females who ever had a baby born prematurely by race/ethnicity ^{*[28]}		
Non-Hispanic Black: 22% (4.1%)		
Percent of females who ever had a low-birth-weight baby by community area ^{*[29]}		
North Lawndale: 27% (7.9%)		
Percent of females who ever had a low-birth-weight baby by race/ethnicity ^{*[30]}		
Non-Hispanic Black: 16% (3.0%)		
Prevalence of diagnosed high cholesterol by community area and sex [*]		
North Lawndale:	MALE: 28% (8.1%)	FEMALE: 20% (6.7%)
Diabetes		
Diabetes-related mortality rate per 100,000 population – (2019-2023)		
North Lawndale: 129.4 (±27.8)	Chicago: 77.7 (±2.3)	

Rate (Margin of Error, where available).

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Notes

¹ Hirschtick, J. L., Benjamins, M. R., and Homan, S. (2017). Community Health Counts: Sinai Community Health Survey 2.0. Sinai Urban Health Institute, Sinai Health System. Chicago, IL. March 2017.

The Chicago Health Atlas which provides data critical on health outcomes in Chicago neighborhoods/community areas.

² Over half of adults aged 18-64 years were covered by public insurance in North Lawndale. Nearly two out of three non-Hispanic Black adults aged 18-64 years were covered by public insurance

³ North Lawndale has the lowest percentage of adults aged 18-64 years with private health insurance, at 22%.

⁴ Non-Hispanic Black adults had the highest percentage of 18–64-year-olds covered by public health insurance (64%)

⁵ Among females, the percentage with a usual place of health care was highest for non-Hispanic Black females (96%)

⁶ The percentage of females with a routine check-up in the past year was highest for non-Hispanic Black females (84%).

⁷ The percentage of females who visited an emergency room for their own care was highest for non-Hispanic Black females (49%). Also, the percentage of males who visited an emergency room for their own care which was highest for non-Hispanic Black males (49%)

⁸ The percentage of adults who did not get needed medical care or surgery in the past year due to cost was highest for non-Hispanic Black adults (13%) About one in eight non-Hispanic Black adults did not get needed medical care or surgery in the past year due to cost

⁹ Among non-Hispanic Black adults, about one in three reported fair or poor health status.

¹⁰ The percentage of males reporting fair or poor health status was highest for non-Hispanic Black males (36%)

¹¹ In North Lawndale, over half of female residents were obese. At least 50% of non-Hispanic Black females were obese.

¹² Among females, the prevalence of obesity ranged from a high of 58% for females in North Lawndale

¹³ Prevalence of obesity by race/ethnic group for females was highest for non-Hispanic Black females (52%). Among males, the prevalence of obesity was highest for non-Hispanic Black males (41%)

¹⁴ In North Lawndale, over one in five adults had asthma.

¹⁵ In North Lawndale, more than one in five adults had asthma. Among females, non-Hispanic Black females had the highest prevalence of asthma (24%). Non-Hispanic Black males had an asthma prevalence that was at least three times greater than males in other race/ethnic groups. Over one in three non-Hispanic Black males had COPD

¹⁶ Asthma prevalence was highest for non-Hispanic Black males (16%).

¹⁷ In North Lawndale, at least one in four residents had screened or diagnosed COPD.

¹⁸ The prevalence of screened or diagnosed COPD was highest for non-Hispanic Black males (35%) and non-Hispanic Black females (29%).

¹⁹ In North Lawndale, nearly half of females had been diagnosed with high blood pressure and was highest for non-Hispanic Black females (16%)

²⁰ In North Lawndale, one in six adults had current depression symptoms.

²¹ Lowest for non-Hispanic Black females

²² In North Lawndale, about one in six adults had current depression symptoms

²³ At least one in four females in North Lawndale had current PTSD symptoms. About one in five non-Hispanic Black adults had current PTSD symptoms.

²⁴ The average number of physically unhealthy days in the past month ranged from a high of 5.6 days for males in North Lawndale

²⁵ The average number of physically unhealthy days in the past month was highest for non-Hispanic Black males (4.4 days).

²⁶ Among North Lawndale females who had at least one live birth, about one in three ever had a baby born prematurely and one in four ever had a low-birth-weight baby. Among non-Hispanic Black females who had at least one live birth, 22% ever had a baby born prematurely and 16% ever had a

low-birth-weight baby. The percentage of females who ever had a low-birth-weight baby was nearly three times as high for non-Hispanic Black females compared to non-Hispanic White females

²⁷ Among females who had at least one live birth, the percentage who ever had a baby born prematurely ranged from a high of 32% for females in North Lawndale. In North Lawndale, about one in three women who had at least one live birth ever had a baby born prematurely.

²⁸ Among females who had at least one live birth, the percentage who ever had a baby born prematurely was highest for non-Hispanic Black females (22%). Nearly one in four non-Hispanic Black females who had at least one live birth ever had a baby born prematurely

²⁹ Among females who had at least one live birth, the percentage who ever had a low-birth-weight baby ranged from a high of 27% for females in North Lawndale. In North Lawndale, over one in four women who had at least one live birth ever had a low-birth-weight baby.

³⁰ Among females who had at least one live birth, there was a statistically significant difference in the percentage who ever had a low-birth-weight baby, which was highest for non-Hispanic Black females (16%). The percentage of females who ever had a low-birth-weight baby was nearly three times as high for non-Hispanic Black females compared to non-Hispanic White females



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