



# Employment Prospects for People with Criminal Records in Washington, DC

## *Speaker Biographies*

**Will Avila** is founder and CEO of Changing Perceptions, a nonprofit that helps returning citizens be successful in the labor market, with the ultimate goal of owning and running a business. Avila created Changing Perceptions because of his experiences owning and operating Clean Decisions, a general labor services firm that employs returning citizens to work in industrial kitchen cleaning in Washington, DC. Avila grew frustrated when he encouraged and supported Clean Decisions members as they branched out into other jobs, only to see them end up stuck in dead-end roles with little opportunity for advancement or upward mobility. These experiences led to the founding of Changing Perceptions, which supports returning citizens by helping them develop skills and attitudes to be competitive and successful in the labor market.

**Marina Duane** is a research associate in the Urban Institute's Justice Policy Center and has over eight years of experience in policy research and analysis. She conducts research on multidisciplinary justice policies and provides technical assistance to local jurisdictions on implementing evidence-based practices and improving their policies. Recently, she led a study on criminal background checks assessing employment barriers for justice-involved people in Washington, DC.

**Brian Ferguson** is director of the DC Mayor's Office of Returning Citizen Affairs. Ferguson previously was the human rights officer and investigator within the DC Office of Human Rights, where he led public outreach and trainings pursuant to the District's new Fair Criminal Record Screening Amendment Act (or ban the box). In 2002, while an undergraduate at West Virginia University, Ferguson's law school plans were derailed when he was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole after being wrongfully convicted of homicide. After an 11-year legal battle, the conviction was overturned and he returned home. In 2014, he founded Startline, a nonprofit online platform to assist returning citizens with identifying and locating available resources and services. In 2015, Ferguson was elected to the Voices for a Second Chance board of directors, which seeks to bridge the gap between incarceration and the community.

**Malcom Glenn** manages strategic partnerships at Uber Technologies in Washington, DC, where he focuses on policy and community engagement with national organizations. He spearheads Uber's outreach around increasing opportunities for drivers facing barriers to work, expanding Uber to areas with limited transportation options, and increasing the platform's accessibility for people with disabilities. Before joining Uber, Glenn was an executive communications manager at Google, where he developed strategic communications for Google's chief financial officer and his leadership team. Before joining Google, Glenn was the national director of communications at the American Federation for Children, an advocacy organization focused on expanding educational options for children from low-income families, and he previously worked on issue campaigns at the polling firm Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research. Glenn received a bachelor's degree in history from Harvard College, where he was the president of the *Harvard Crimson*.



**Sakenia Hammond** has been released from incarceration for almost a year after 16 years in custody. Coming back to the society has been an emotional path, where she realized how much she'd missed. Hammond had to relearn daily activities, such as travelling by bus. Since her release, she was afforded an opportunity to obtain her business license and is looking forward to starting her business in September. She is working at a retail store to support herself.

**Charles Jones** is deputy director at the DC Department of Employment Services, where he was first selected to facilitate the rejuvenation of the Welfare-to-Work initiative, which helped prepare welfare recipients for the workforce. The initiative's success gave way to Project Empowerment, which provides employment, job counseling, and life-skills services to District residents facing barriers to long-term employment. In addition to Project Empowerment, the Division of State Initiatives encompasses each of the agency's transitional employment programs and special initiatives serving the hardest to serve. Among Jones's awards and accolades is the prestigious Cafritz Award for distinguished DC government employees, which he received in 2016.

**Nancy La Vigne** is director of the Justice Policy Center at the Urban Institute. She publishes research on prisoner reentry, criminal justice technologies, crime prevention, policing, and the spatial analysis of crime and criminal behavior. Her work appears in scholarly journals and practitioner publications and has made her a sought-after spokesperson on related subjects. Before being appointed director, La Vigne was a senior research associate at Urban, directing groundbreaking research on prisoner reentry. Before joining Urban, La Vigne was founding director of the Crime Mapping Research Center at the National Institute of Justice. She later was special assistant to the assistant attorney general for the Office of Justice Programs within the US Department of Justice. She has also been research director for the Texas sentencing commission, research fellow at the Police Executive Research Forum, and consultant to the National Council on Crime and Delinquency. La Vigne was executive director for the bipartisan Charles Colson Task Force on Federal Corrections Reform. She chairs the board of the Crime and Justice Research Alliance and serves on the board for the Consortium of Social Science Associations. She testifies before Congress on prisoner reentry and criminal justice reform and has been featured on NPR and in the *Atlantic*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Chicago Tribune*. La Vigne holds a BA in government and economics from Smith College, an MA in public affairs from the LBJ School at the University of Texas at Austin, and a PhD in criminal justice from Rutgers University.

**Katherine Mereand-Sinha** is program manager for technology and innovation at the DC Department of Small and Local Business Development. She provides one-on-one technical assistance to any DC-based business seeking to grow, with a focus on diversity inclusion and the technology sector. Her work includes supports for the entrepreneurial ecosystem to ensure it is inclusive and innovative. Mereand also conducts stakeholder groups and pilot programs to support specific populations in the District as they pursue entrepreneurship, including youth, the disability community, and those involved with the justice system. Systems alignment around entrepreneurial needs includes engaging the finance, legal, workforce, and social services communities to ensure small businesses can grow and thrive. The longest-running program and stakeholder group is the Aspire to Entrepreneurship program supporting returning citizens opening businesses in DC.



**Cynthia W. Roseberry** is executive director of the Council for Court Excellence. Before joining the council, she was executive director for the historic Clemency Project 2014, was on the Colson Task Force on Federal Corrections, and was executive director of the Federal Defenders of the Middle District of Georgia. Recently, she presented a TEDx talk from inside a prison.

**Gustavo Velasquez** is director of the Urban Institute's Washington-Area Research Initiative, a cross-center initiative and multidisciplinary program of evidence and policy analysis focused on the national capital region. Velasquez served for nearly three years as assistant secretary for fair housing and equal opportunity at the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). He served on behalf of the president as the strategic lead of the fair housing and inclusive community agenda for the Obama administration. During his tenure, HUD achieved groundbreaking enforcement victories in fair lending and in major housing discrimination cases. Velasquez led efforts to promulgate the landmark Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing rule, a key tool for cities, states, and other HUD funding recipients to reduce inequality and disparities in access to opportunity. Velasquez worked in executive roles in the administrations of DC mayors Anthony Williams, Adrian Fenty, and Vincent Gray. He also has nonprofit experience as executive director of the Latino Economic Development Center, a local community development organization in Washington, DC, and Congreso de Latinos Unidos, the leading social service provider to Latinos in Philadelphia. Velasquez has served on numerous boards and committees of financial institutions, civil rights groups, and educational organizations at the local and national levels. He graduated from the University of Pennsylvania with a master's degree in public administration.