



# County of Santa Cruz

COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **BUILDING FUTURES: EMPLOYERS GATHER TO OFFER “FAIR CHANCE”**

As communities across the nation look for ways to address the U.S. incarceration crisis, business leaders and criminal justice experts will gather in Santa Cruz County June 10 to discuss ways to find good employees and help those with criminal records break the cycle of crime and prison.

“Building Futures” features training and resources for business owners and human resources professionals on the best hiring practices for applicants with criminal records, and builds on Santa Cruz County’s longstanding, progressive approach to offender rehabilitation and reentry. Speakers will include local business owners and employees; Jeanne Woodford, former California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation director; and Stephanie Akhter, Reentry and Employment Project Manager for the New York-based Council for State Governments Justice Center.

“Employment is critical to our efforts to improve public safety. Crime is often perpetuated by those who lack hope and feel they are not productive contributors to society,” said Woodford, who served as warden at San Quentin State Prison from 1999-2004. “We underestimate the importance of structure and employment in reducing recidivism and making our communities safer.”

Approximately one-third of U.S. adults have a criminal record, and every year more than 700,000 Americans are released from prison while another 9 million cycle through jails. Finding work is key to breaking the nation from the cycle of incarceration, with the potential to save taxpayers some of the hundreds of billions in annual criminal justice spending while mapping a brighter future for the 5 million U.S. children who have had a parent in jail or prison.

In April, President Obama launched the Fair Chance Business Pledge, calling on businesses to eliminate barriers to employment for people returning to their communities after incarceration. Facebook, Uber, Starbucks, PepsiCo and many others have joined the



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initiative. In Santa Cruz County, numerous local businesses will be attending the event, which is supported by several local chambers of commerce.

“Businesses are increasingly hiring people with criminal records, but a lot of work remains in reducing the stigma attached to this group so they can find meaningful employment and bring their talents to the labor market,” said Stefan LoBuglio, Director of Corrections and Reentry at The Council of State Governments Justice Center.

“Companies with fair hiring practices have discovered these workers perform as well or better than other employees.”

Recognizing the costly trajectory of incarceration trends, California has undertaken a series of reforms aimed at reducing the prison population and criminal justice burdens on the state and its residents, including AB 109 prison realignment and Proposition 47 sentencing reforms. The Legislature also implemented an amnesty program making it easier for people to reclaim driving privileges.

Nationally, more than 100 cities, counties and states have implemented “ban the box” or other Fair Chance hiring reforms, hoping to improve post-incarceration outcomes for people and to reduce recidivism. A recent White House report analyzing the economic benefits of criminal justice reforms underscored the role employment plays in reducing recidivism.

“We wanted to help people change their lives. Opening up our hiring to these programs gave us the opportunity to train people in a new career, give them some life skills and help our business grow,” said Sequoia Cheney, a cofounder with husband Jack of Wonderfully Raw Gourmet. “These are people who just wanted someone to give them an opportunity, and many became core employees who stayed for many years. It has been tremendously rewarding for us and for them.”

“Building Futures” is cosponsored by Santa Cruz Area Chamber of Commerce, Pajaro Valley Chamber of Commerce & Agriculture, Small Business Development Center, Workforce Investment Board and many more.

Media is invited to attend. Pre-event interviews are available. Tickets [available here](#).

**WHAT:** Building Futures  
**WHEN:** Friday, June 10, 8 a.m.-10 a.m. (doors open 7:30 a.m.)  
**WHERE:** Twin Lakes Church  
2701 Cabrillo College Dr.  
Aptos, Calif. 95003