

Green Reentry: Criminal Justice Reform for a Just Energy Transition

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Abstract

Efforts to reform the US criminal justice system and to slow the effects of a changing climate are often deliberated, but rarely connected. Current legislative action to reduce recidivism – via the First Step Act of 2018 – and a landmark proposal to reduce carbon emissions – the Green New Deal – dominate headlines and debate. Community engagement is a critical factor in ensuring

these programs address distributive inequities and promote human well-being. In this paper, the authors propose a synergistic potential of strategic action on these two societal issues. An analysis and synthesis of the literature shows that vocational correctional programs in renewable energy emerge as a means to both reduce recidivism and set a path to a low-carbon future. We offer details on successful policies and programs supporting criminal justice reform and climate action and conclude by offering specific recommendations for legislation, hiring practices, and outreach.

Keywords

Climate policy, prisoner reentry, community engagement, First Step Act, Green New Deal

1. Introduction

Two urgent societal issues – criminal justice reform and climate change – are *prima facie* unconnected, yet have synergistic potential. The linkage between environmental and social issues and the potential of policies to integrate social, economic, and environmental considerations is well documented (Nanda 2016). In addition to tapping the *Invest-Divest* demand of the Movement for Black Lives (Akbar 2018), action on these societal needs is also a centerpiece of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations 2015). Broadly, the UN’s position is tasked with reducing inequality, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and providing access to affordable and reliable energy. Coordination at the local, state, and federal levels offers a unique opportunity to integrate criminal justice reform efforts with simultaneous efforts to remediate and reduce poverty and reform climate policy through innovative new strategies.

1.1 Crime and climate in the United States

The United States is in a unique position with respect to both criminal justice and climate policy. The US has the highest incarceration rate in the world (Wagner and Sawyer 2018; World Prison Brief n.d.-a). Though estimates vary, the US prison population rate is approximately 650 per 100,000 population (Kaeble and Cowhig 2018; The Sentencing Project 2019; World Prison Brief n.d.-b). US sentencing guidelines, mandatory minimum sentencing, and other policies and practices have contributed to these incarceration rates (World Prison Brief n.d.-a) and trend toward punitive rather than restorative ends (National Research Council 2014).

In addition to its notable incarceration rates, the US has a highly visible position on the world stage with respect to climate policy. A poll by The Washington Post and the Kaiser Family Foundation recently found that nearly 80% of respondents described climate change as a “crisis” or a “major problem” (Dennis et al. 2019). However, the US is among the top emitters of carbon dioxide, globally (Global Carbon Project n.d.; US Department of Energy 2017). Despite the public sentiment and the magnitude of the United States’ contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions, the US recently completed its withdrawal from the Paris Agreement (US Department of State 2019) which has been signed by nearly 200 countries; it is the only nation to leave the agreement (United Nations 2019).

It is with these two exigent societal issues in mind – criminal justice reform and action on a changing climate – that the authors gravitated toward this question: can policymakers and communities leverage renewable energy projects to catalyze a more just energy future by providing meaningful employment for ex-offenders? In this paper, we present findings of a

synthesis of the literature to lay out a case for directing correctional vocational training toward jobs in the renewable energy sector as a strategy for a low-carbon future and reducing recidivism. In addition to the two pieces of legislation that we analyze, we focus the literature review on peer reviewed social sciences literature, government reports, and studies from non-governmental organizations with an emphasis on recent studies and data; more than 70% of the literature reviewed was published in 2010 or later. As the first analysis connecting the First Step Act and the Green New Deal, the results of this study make a significant contribution to both criminal justice and environmental policy research by highlighting the “win-win” of developing paths to employment for formerly incarcerated persons in renewable energy careers.

1.2 First Step Act of 2018

In December of 2018, The First Step Act (2018) was signed into law. The goal of this bipartisan legislation is federal prison and sentencing reform. Notably, recidivism reduction programs are a key component of this law (Feniak 2019). The First Step Act identifies evidence-based recidivism reduction programs as a priority in reforming the criminal justice system in the US and specifies that partnerships with vocational training entities are one method of implementing these programs (Feniak 2019). Correctional vocational training programs are currently offered in some settings and have the ability to prepare inmates for stable employment after release from prison, fostering prosocial relationships and financial stability (Boman and Mowen 2017).

With an incarcerated population of over 2.1 million (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2018) and 650,000 people released from prison each year (U.S. Department of Justice 2016), the impact of formerly incarcerated persons in society is significant. Notably, rearrest rates in the US are

greater than 50% (The Council of Economic Advisers 2018), indicating that recidivism – a “relapse into criminal behavior, often after...intervention for a previous crime” (National Institute of Justice 2019) – has a significant impact on the number of people incarcerated in the US. Unemployment among formerly incarcerated persons ranges from 35-60% (Murphy-Dunning 2012) as compared to 3.7% for the US (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2019). Vocational training in prison improves employment outcomes (Green for All 2011). The RAND Corporation (Davis et al. 2014) found that correctional education reduced recidivism by 43% and increased post-release employment chances by 13%. Preparing those leaving prison for employment is important: employment provides a path to societal reentry (The Council of State Governments Justice Center 2013) and meaningful work can serve as a “rehabilitative tool” (National Research Council 2014, p. 192).

1.3 Green New Deal (H.Res. 109, 116th Congress)

At the same time that the US is contemplating structural criminal justice reforms, the urgent climate crisis has led US lawmakers to propose a sweeping agenda – the Green New Deal (H.Res. 109, 2019) – for addressing climate change through a massive government program to achieve net-zero net greenhouse emissions combined with an aggressive social and economic agenda. The Green New Deal envisions promotion of justice and equality in meeting US energy needs and addressing the climate crisis in a manner which also creates well-paying jobs and promotes access to education and training.

This legislative proposal is intended to ensure a just transition to a low-carbon future that mitigates impacts on frontline communities. Notably, community-defined projects are a

centerpiece of this proposal. Just solutions involve and empower communities (Finley-Brook and Holloman 2016) and recognize and address the interconnection of energy systems with social, economic, and political systems.

In order to both improve the employment outcomes for formerly incarcerated persons and promote a transition to a just and sustainable energy future, the Green New Deal's focus on low-carbon jobs represents a heretofore unlikely mechanism for implementing current criminal justice reform priorities. Green job training programs to facilitate employment during reentry are not new, but to date they have not been positioned as a link between criminal justice reform and climate action. If structured appropriately, green job training programs have the potential to provide social benefits in terms of employment opportunities for formerly incarcerated persons while simultaneously reducing recidivism. To support this case, we highlight linkages between correctional training programs, employment for ex-offenders, and reduced recidivism and three goals of the Green New Deal: energy infrastructure, high-wage jobs, and community-defined projects (Figure 1).

[Insert Figure 1 here.]

2. Literature review

Part of the lasting legacy of a period of mass incarceration in which the US is currently mired involves the sheer numbers of people who are released from prison each year (Morenoff and Harding 2014). Estimates suggest that nearly three-quarters of a million people are released from US prisons every year (US Department of Justice, 2016). This is extremely problematic since American rearrest rates routinely exceed 50% (The Council of Economic Advisers 2018). This

incarceration-release-reincarceration cycle negatively impacts communities by causing disruption in social organization, family structure, and community efficacy (Morenoff and Harding 2014).

In addition to societal impacts, incarceration and recidivism have real and tangible economic costs (The Council of Economic Advisers 2018). As a nation, 1.4% of the US GDP is spent on the criminal justice system (The Council of Economic Advisers 2016). In addition, incarceration impacts local economies by reducing the pool of workers and reducing income available to families (Morenoff and Harding 2014). Providing services to reduce recidivism risk can be cost-effective. Although not the focus of the current work, providing services in mental health and substance abuse treatment as a means of recidivism reduction only require modest reductions in recidivism in order to be cost-effective (The Council of Economic Advisers 2018).

Incarceration also has intangible and indirect consequences on employment and financial stability. Unemployment often coincides with a lack of health insurance and higher costs for maintaining one's health or treating illness. Unemployment after incarceration also affects an individual's ability to secure housing and reliable transportation; these impacts add up to negatively affect families (financial instability, negative stress) and increase social inequality (The Council of Economic Advisers 2016). In order to achieve reductions in recidivism, as a society, we need to establish "meaningful alternatives" to crime (The Council of Economic Advisers, 2016, p. 41).

Evidence-based recidivism reduction programs are a central component of the First Step Act. This legislation allows Federal Bureau of Prisons wardens to enter into partnerships with nonprofits, higher education institutions, vocational training organizations, industry, and others to implement such programs. These policies most often result in the implementation of a variety of recidivism reduction programs, many of which are rooted in addressing severe substance use needs and vocational training.

Our synergistic approach embraces a mechanism which fosters community building. Because criminal justice systems disproportionately punish socially and economically disenfranchised groups, community involvement in reentry is critical (Duckett and Schinkel 2008). In fact, the Maori tradition stresses that there is a collective, societal responsibility for wrongdoing which requires a collective, societal response to those wrongs (Bidois 2017). Building community supports for formerly incarcerated persons during reentry contributes to a stronger sense of belonging and stability (Gal 2016). Social supports have been associated with lower levels of depression and less externalization of symptoms in adolescents who have had encounters with the criminal justice system (Johnson et al. 2011). Correctional education programs serve to develop these relationships between prisoners and the communities which they will rejoin after their release (Butler and Maruna 2016). This provides hope and optimism to those reentering society because it demonstrates that there is a real path to legitimate employment after release (Butler and Maruna 2016).

There is a tremendous amount of work demonstrating that vocational training in correctional settings prepares offenders for employment after their release from prison. Lack of job skills and

lack of education are noted as two causes of incarceration and recidivism (Sedgley et al. 2010). Correctional education has been demonstrated to be not only effective – providing a decrease in recidivism of 13-43% and an increase in post-release employment of 13% (Davis et al. 2014) – but also cost-effective (Hrabowski and Robbi 2002). There are, however, limitations and caveats on the effectiveness of correctional education programs. Job-specific training has a positive relationship with post-release employment (Flatt and Jacobs 2018, p. 281). Similarly, targeting training (Duke 2018; Newton et al. 2018) and providing wrap-around (Newton et al. 2018) and post-employment services to match individual needs, risks, and “unique barriers” (Flatt and Jacobs 2018) has been found to extend the positive effect of correctional education beyond two years, after which such recidivism benefits may fade (Newton et al. 2018).

Despite the limitations, correctional vocational training “works” (Bouffard, Mackenzie, and Hickman 2000, p. 18) and helps to smooth life transitions and turning points like reentry after incarceration (Flatt and Jacobs 2018). However, training should not be limited to the correctional setting. Instead, it should extend into the community and involve employers and community organizations. In a succinct synopsis of this phenomenon, scientists conclude that community-based education is “promising” (Bouffard et al., 2000, p. 32; Flatt & Jacobs, 2018, p. 282).

3. Analysis

The First Step Act incorporates correctional vocational training to place incarcerated persons on a trajectory toward employment upon release and a lower chance of returning to prison. In this section, we will evaluate vocational training, employment, and reduced recidivism against three

goals of the Green New Deal – energy infrastructure, high-wage jobs, and community-defined projects – to identify areas of alignment between the law and the current legislative proposal.

3.1 The climate crisis is a driver for correctional training programs to focus on renewable energy. Energy is critical for a thriving global economy because the energy sector 1) creates jobs as well as creates value in terms of goods and services associated with extraction, processing, and energy generation and 2) is a prerequisite for economic growth in other sectors (World Economic Forum n.d.). However, the energy sector – still largely reliant on burning fossil fuels like natural gas, coal, and oil for electricity and heat – has a significant impact on greenhouse gas emissions associated with climate change (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency n.d.). In order to decrease the effects of these emissions, a move to renewable energy is needed and is a centerpiece of the Green New Deal proposal. Growth in renewable energy jobs is underway, and the US Bureau of Labor Statistics projects continued growth. In fact, solar photovoltaic installers and wind turbine technicians are expected to see 104.9% and 96.3% growth, respectively, through 2026 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2019), leading all occupations.

The negative effects of climate change are disproportionately seen in disadvantaged, vulnerable communities that are least able to take voluntary adaptation measures (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2014, 2018). Similarly, disadvantaged neighborhoods are disproportionately affected by incarceration (Morenoff and Harding 2014; National Research Council 2014; The Council of Economic Advisers 2016). To ensure that a transition to renewable energy does not further impact already vulnerable communities, community-led projects as advanced by the

Green New Deal may provide a means for stakeholder engagement that lays the groundwork for a just and sustainable energy future.

3.2 Employment in the energy sector provides benefits for ex-offenders

In rational choice theory and general strain theory, the commission of crime is often an economic decision as unemployment exerts a negative strain on individuals (Siwach 2018). Although the link between employment and reoffending is complex (Flatt and Jacobs 2018; Newton et al. 2018; Sedgley et al. 2010), employment sets the stage for many behaviors, including a personal routine, accountability, and financial stability which reduce criminogenic risk and thereby contribute to reducing recidivism (The Council of State Governments Justice Center 2013). For example, employment after release is critical to successful reentry in order to sever ties to peers engaged in criminal activity as well as build positive “prosocial” relationships through the workplace (Boman and Mowen 2017). In California, an increase in the availability of more construction and manufacturing jobs was linked to a decrease in ex-offender return to prison (Schnepel 2016). Employers with these types of jobs frequently provide gainful employment to formerly incarcerated persons (Flatt and Jacobs 2018; Lichtenberger 2006), provide higher wages than food service and retail (Schnepel 2016), and are part of a career ladder (Interstate Renewable Energy Council 2019; U.S. Department of Energy n.d.). Formerly incarcerated persons are already employed as welders, construction workers, in the steel industry, and in agriculture; renewable energy projects rely on these industries and skillsets (Boman et al. 2020). Construction and maintenance, in particular, have been relatively stable employers of ex-felons over time. An earlier study found construction as a leading employer of ex-offenders two and eight months post-release (Visher et al. 2008). State government labor and industry agencies are

also attuned to the construction industry as an employer of ex-offenders. For example, the State of New Jersey partners with the construction industry and construction job-training programs to support employment opportunities for ex-offenders and the Montana Career Resource Network specifies construction and manufacturing as industries which hire ex-felons (Montana Department of Labor and Industry 2011; State of New Jersey n.d.).

3.3 Engaged communities can advocate for employment for ex-offenders

Industrial siting decisions, in particular those associated with renewable energy facilities, represent a “social dilemma” (Wolsink, 2007, p. 2699). As with any industrial facility, renewable energy project siting might elicit community concerns; at the same time, the community may fear that any apprehension of a renewable energy project could delay progress on mitigating the effects climate change. Thus, local involvement in decision making is needed to ensure that local “crucial values” are considered in the project and to ensure that the siting process is perceived as fair (Wolsink, 2007, p. 2694). A review of several studies of industrial siting decision making indicates that social impacts – including employment – are often not addressed in siting decisions, but perhaps should be incorporated through engaging with the affected community.

Multi-criteria decision making (MCDM) is appropriate for renewable energy projects (Kaya et al. 2018) as this approach is able to incorporate risks, costs, and opportunities in a siting analysis (Aragonés-Beltrán et al. 2014). However, MCDM often does not include “affected people in an appropriate way” (Krütli et al. 2010), lacking appropriate stakeholder engagement which could be beneficial (Fard et al. 2016). MCDM can be expanded to incorporate not just technical and environmental criteria, but also social, political, and other requirements (Rikalovic et al. 2014).

Despite this, industrial site selections are often made based on criteria related to infrastructure and speed of construction, even if social criteria have been included in the analysis (Bagocius et al. 2014). There are, however, some exceptions, as well as corresponding arguments for including socioeconomic considerations in industrial siting decisions. In particular, stakeholder engagement may be an effective method of gleaning socioeconomic issues important to communities when siting industrial facilities (Fard et al. 2016). Although there are subtle differences between the terms “public participation” and “stakeholder engagement” (Ross et al. 2016), we use the terms interchangeably (in the manner of the International Association for Public Participation) but will favor stakeholder engagement to emphasize a two-way interaction between companies and stakeholders which is beyond standard “decide-announce-defend” practices.

Incorporating public values into decision making allows citizens to become “value consultants” and provide important information to decisionmakers as they develop and make choices about a project (Beierle, 1999, p. 90). Stakeholder involvement increases cost-effectiveness of decisions and allows for joint gains and novel ideas which result in higher-quality decisions (Beierle 2002). Stakeholder involvement serves a critical role in learning about a community’s thoughts about a particular site, characteristics of the community, and particular subgroups within the community who should be consulted (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency 2018).

Many energy companies include social impact and stakeholder engagement as part of their sustainability efforts (Cabot, n.d.; NextEra Energy, n.d., and others), though the level of engagement with communities varies. Stakeholder engagement early in facility siting decisions

allows stakeholders to surface specific socioeconomic issues important to a community. It is critical to understand that community engagement early in renewable energy projects will be an important mechanism to learn about the issue of employment of local residents, including formerly incarcerated persons. Additionally, this community engagement approach aligns with the reduced recidivism goal of the First Step Act and the community focus of the Green New Deal.

Community engagement activities must also incorporate mechanisms to reduce social stigma associated with persons who have been incarcerated. The State of Vermont uses inclusive, community-based approaches to reduce recidivism. Social supports, allowing ex-offenders an opportunity to build a new image, are deployed along with housing and employment supports in the state's reentry programs (Fox 2010). That so-called "new image" is attached to a personal narrative – developed for society and for the ex-felon themselves – which may have been influenced by early labeling (Becker 1963) and will be uneven as individuals in reentry navigate entrenched societal structures (Harding et al. 2017). Social supports – the opposite of exclusionary social practices – are critical to promote emotional well-being, though they require communities to shift their views of the formerly incarcerated. Techniques such as values affirmation mechanisms decrease discriminatory tendencies, increase prosocial behaviors, and contribute to the perspective that ex-offenders are deserving of a second chance (Schneider and Weber 2020). Inclusionary practices can counterbalance the expected exclusionary reception that ex-felons anticipate receiving, potentially fostering further openness on the part of the formerly incarcerated person to share their status and story. An inclusive climate may help to break the

cycle of withdrawal and discrimination, placing individuals on a more prosocial path (Winnick and Bodkin 2008).

3.4 Opportunities resulting from policy alignment

Figure 2 identifies specific areas of alignment between the First Step Act and the Green New Deal. Rather than provide vocational training programs and employment opportunities in isolation, these actions can be aligned to support the ambitious goals of the Green New Deal.

Vocational training programs should be focused on skills required to develop renewable energy infrastructure. Post-release employment in the renewable energy sector provides the high-wage jobs called for in the Green New Deal. The ultimate goal of the First Step Act – lower rates of recidivism – would be supported by renewable energy training and employment opportunities, ultimately benefitting communities who would be engaged in and provide input into projects from their earliest stages.

[Insert Figure 2 here.]

4. Discussion

Structured appropriately, correctional vocational training programs foster stable employment, financial stability, and social norms which reduce recidivism and contribute to local economies. As a result, vocational training and reentry employment programs have been identified as opportunities to foster the community-focused goals of restorative justice (Branham 2012). In this section, the authors provide recommendations for achieving both the recidivism reduction goals of the First Step Act and the community-based carbon reduction goals of the Green New Deal.

Integrating established and specialized reentry employment initiatives with the implementation of climate policy requires deliberate and holistic policy development. Green reentry programs should include collaboration with employers and communities and programming in jails and prisons. Comprehensive green reentry initiatives can reduce barriers to employment, stigma, and discrimination and encourage employment-based reentry programs through correctional green-energy job training programs, contractual stipulations, and employer incentives. While these policies do not constitute a comprehensive shift away from incarceration (Ajuwa and Onwuachi-Willig 2018) nor the restructuring of the U.S. criminal justice system for which many have advocated, opportunities to integrate criminal justice reform practices into the green energy agenda should not be overlooked. Specific restorative justice green energy job programs provide the prospect of community-based implementation of sustainable development and climate policy in a manner that encourages development of infrastructure, meaningful engagement, and reentry.

Even qualified and well-equipped applicants face formidable obstacles to employment owing to employer concerns regarding hiring formerly incarcerated applicants (Holzer et al. 2003). Reducing discrimination is critical to the success of green-jobs and other employment-based reentry programs. Thus, practices that address the disparate treatment of job applicants should be clarified and expanded. Numerous states, cities, and counties have enacted efforts to delay questions about past offenses (so-called “ban the box” efforts) and provide case-by-case evaluations of criminal history (National Employment Law Project et al. 2010). In several jurisdictions these “fair-chance” laws extend to private employment and government contractors (NELP 2019). These programs do not make it unlawful to discriminate on the basis of former

prisoner status (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission 2012); rather, their goal is to provide a clearer, fairer method of evaluating applicants. The patchwork of federal, state, and local policies and practices and laws related to hiring ex-felons may manifest itself in disparate treatment of job applicants (Hickox and Roehling 2013) or encourage discrimination on the basis of race (Agan and Starr 2017). Thus, as Ajunwa and Onwuachi-Willig (2018) have identified, litigation on the basis of ban-the-box laws is unlikely to eliminate discrimination in the labor market and thus contractual and legislative actions, in conjunction with expanded outreach to employers and various levels of government, may be necessary to reduce barriers to employment.

Specialized employment and reentry initiatives that cross communities and jails and prisons through a focus on work-training programs and community benefits may address employment barriers (Branham 2012). These programs include financial incentives in the form of Work Opportunity Tax Credits to employers hiring from target groups, including ex-felons (IRS n.d.). Employers can also be encouraged to adopt fair hiring policies through contractual stipulations that bar discrimination by employers using prison labor or which mimic federal diversity initiatives (Ajunwa and Onwuachi-Willig 2018). Additionally, individualized review of applicants reduces the potential for disparate treatment of applicants (Hickox and Roehling 2013). Involving employers as collaborators in ensuring a successful work environment by incentivizing post-employment training programs has been shown to have a positive effect on employment (Flatt and Jacobs 2018) especially when offered in conjunction with other services (Newton et al. 2018). Correctional education, vocational training, and work programs that certify an applicant's training also incentivize employers to hire ex-offenders with a non-violent felony

conviction (RAND Corporation 2018). These programs can be integrated with green jobs and infrastructure programs at the federal, state, and national level. For instance, programs which provide “green job” training for formerly incarcerated persons have been successful in Chicago (Green for All n.d.), Pennsylvania (Chillrud 2019), and elsewhere (Roots of Success n.d.).

The greatest opportunity for developing green reentry programs is likely at the local level. The National League of Cities and the National Employment Law Project (2010) put forth a publication that encourages cities to adopt reentry policies that promote hiring of people with criminal records. In addition to adopting fair-hiring practices for government contractors, it suggests creation of financial incentives, use of bid incentive programs, and leverage of development funds to create community-based employment strategies to specifically target people with criminal records. The Clean Energy Works Portland Pilot Program in Portland Oregon, for instance, ensures that 30% of employees are hired from “low income communities” and include “formerly incarcerated individuals seeking new opportunities for responsible citizenship and economic self-sufficiency”(Clean Energy Works Portland 2009). In addition to public programs like that in Portland, communities can also negotiate with private developers for local hiring commitments and environmental improvements through community benefit agreements (Fazio and Wallace 2010). In these agreements, which are becoming increasingly common (Fazio and Wallace 2010), communities will negotiate for local hiring or other improvements in exchange for community support of locally undesirable projects (Salkin and Lavine 2008). Together, community economic development practitioners and reentry practitioners can collaborate to improve the efficacy of these initiatives (Ball 2008) and to

develop policies for structured and deliberate approaches for career paths in renewable energy (Apollo Alliance and Green for All 2008).

The Green New Deal envisions climate policy as a mechanism for disrupting social and economic inequalities. As a result, The Green New Deal has been criticized for “creating unrealistically high expectations for climate policy and compromising the effectiveness of emission reduction strategies” (Sussman 2019, p. 10446). However, the history of the environmental movement demonstrates that an energy transition focused solely on environmental protection without regard to distributive inequalities may exacerbate the vulnerability of low-income communities and distribution of environmental harms (Purdy 2018). The renewable energy transition demands systemic transformation to achieve energy justice (Baker 2019). Incorporating community voices and stakeholders in energy decision making is critical to designing community-led local energy programs that address vulnerabilities and provide opportunities for political and economic empowerment, including programs for local jobs, education, and training. Our recommendations for enacting policies which support green reentry as both a mechanism for decreasing recidivism and spurring renewable energy employment are indexed in Table 1.

[Insert Table 1 here.]

Job training programs prepare formerly incarcerated persons for employment, a contributor to reduced recidivism. Fair chance hiring practices ensure opportunity for those recently released from prison. Employer incentives provide economic incentives and assurances to employers

hiring those reentering society after incarceration. Community engagement is critical to address community needs while guarding against exacerbation of challenges that a community may already face. Together, these initiatives have the potential to place community priorities and concerns regarding distributive justice at the center of green energy programs and provide the opportunity for the promotion and incentivization of community-led green reentry programs.

5. Conclusion

The current criminal justice reform effort supports the need for a “moral renaissance” in prisons (Reddon & Durante, 2019, p. 16). Vocational training in correctional settings gives purpose to a person’s incarceration and will facilitate reentry into society after release. Correctional vocational training in renewable energy also ensures a trained workforce for construction, operation, and maintenance of renewable energy facilities. Governments and communities can facilitate this process by incorporating reentry policies into renewable energy siting agreements, community fair-hiring policies, and employer bid incentives. When stakeholders are consulted in the development of renewable energy projects, there is an opportunity for community members to inform project developers of the need for employment for members of their community who have previously been incarcerated but are now trained members of a local workforce. Thus, there are opportunities for transformational justice within green energy development. These efforts assure that economic and infrastructure development associated with the energy transition is sustainable and just.

Meeting the objectives of criminal justice reform by implementing the goals of the Green New Deal represents a socially just and economically responsible energy transition. Correctional

vocational training in renewable energy sector employment can contribute to reduced recidivism, and thus will provide for both positive direct and indirect impacts on communities. Advancing policies which support vocational training programs for ex-offenders in renewable energy and associated fields can help secure the goals of both the Green New Deal and the First Step Act in an empirically effective manner which improves the quality of lives while simultaneously preserving valuable financial resources needed to sustain an already overstretched criminal justice system.

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Figure 1. Selected Individual Goals of the First Step Act and the Green New Deal.



Figure 2. Areas of Alignment Between the First Step Act and the Green New Deal.

Table 1. Recommendations for Green Reentry, Fair Local Hiring, and Community Engagement Policies

Recommendation category		Reference
Job training	Vocational correctional training programs and reentry training programs	Branham, 2012; Chillrud, 2019; Green for All, 2011; RAND Corporation, 2018; Roots of Success, n.d.
	Wrap-around and post-employment training	Flatt and Jacobs, 2018; Newton et al., 2018
	Programs aligned with municipal economic and environmental goals	Apollo Alliance and Green for All, 2008
Fair chance hiring	Contractual stipulations	Ajunwa I and Onwuachi-Willig A, 2018
	Delay questions about past offenses	National Employment Law Project et al., 2010
	Individual application review	Hickox and Roehling, 2013; National Employment Law Project et al., 2010
Employer incentives	Bid incentive programs	National League of Cities and National Employment Law Project, 2010

	Work Opportunity Tax Credits	IRS, n.d.
	Certification programs	RAND Corporation, 2018
Community engagement	Community-based employment strategies	Clean Energy Works Portland, 2009
	Community benefit agreements	Fazio and Wallace, 2010; Salkin and Lavine, 2008

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