



104TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY

State of Illinois

2025 and 2026

HB3491

Introduced 2/18/2025, by Rep. Justin Slaughter and Marcus C. Evans, Jr.

SYNOPSIS AS INTRODUCED:

New Act
5 ILCS 100/5-45.65 new

Creates the Securing All Futures through Equitable Reinvestment (SAFER) Communities Act. Provides that the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity shall create a program to award grants to Navigators for specified purposes, including wage reimbursements for employers that employ certain formerly incarcerated individuals. Contains provisions concerning requirements for wage reimbursements. Provides that "Navigator" means an entity that has demonstrated expertise and effectiveness in administering workforce development programs for formerly incarcerated participants and is certified by the Department as a Navigator. Amends the Illinois Administrative Procedure Act. Authorizes the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity to adopt emergency rules to implement the Securing All Futures through Equitable Reinvestment (SAFER) Communities Act. Effective immediately.

LRB104 10493 SPS 20568 b

1 AN ACT concerning employment.

2 **Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois,**
3 **represented in the General Assembly:**

4 Section 1. Short title. This Act may be cited as the
5 Securing All Futures through Equitable Reinvestment (SAFER)
6 Communities Act.

7 Section 5. Intent. To reverse the trend of high
8 unemployment among formerly incarcerated individuals and to
9 spur the economic recovery of small businesses in Illinois, it
10 is necessary to provide financial incentives for employers to
11 create new, full-time jobs for individuals with felony
12 conviction records.

13 The intent of this Act is to facilitate the re-entry into
14 society of formerly incarcerated individuals and to create
15 financial incentives for employers that hire formerly
16 incarcerated individuals.

17 Section 10. Definitions. As used in this Act:

18 "Average wage" means the average annual wage paid to
19 individuals who are employed in the same occupation as the
20 participant in the metropolitan or nonmetropolitan statistical
21 area where the participant's primary job site is located.

22 "Average annual wage" shall be determined by the Department

1 using the most recent data published by the Bureau of Labor
2 Statistics of the United States Department of Labor in its
3 Occupational Outlook Handbook, or any similar Bureau of Labor
4 Statistics publication, as of the effective date of the
5 agreement for wage reimbursement under this Act.

6 "Barrier reduction funding" has the meaning given to that
7 term in Section 605-415 of the Department of Commerce and
8 Economic Opportunity Law of the Civil Administrative Code of
9 Illinois.

10 "Date of hire" means the first date on which a participant
11 begins working for an employer as a full-time employee.

12 "Department" means the Department of Commerce and Economic
13 Opportunity.

14 "Director" means the Director of Commerce and Economic
15 Opportunity.

16 "Disproportionately impacted area" means a census tract
17 that is located in an R3 Area designated by the Restore,
18 Reinvest, and Renew Program Board in accordance with Section
19 10-40 of the Cannabis Regulation and Tax Act.

20 "Employer" means an Illinois taxpayer that has an
21 agreement with a Navigator to (i) hire at least one
22 participant as a full-time employee and (ii) provide the
23 employee with the knowledge or skills essential to the full
24 and adequate performance of the job.

25 "Full-time employee" means an individual who is employed
26 for at least 30 hours each week in (i) a position that is

1 covered by a collective bargaining agreement between the union
2 and an employer or (ii) a position for which the individual
3 receives a wage that meets or exceeds the average wage for that
4 occupation.

5 "Navigator" means any one or more of the following
6 entities that has demonstrated expertise and effectiveness in
7 administering workforce development programs for formerly
8 incarcerated participants and is certified by the Department
9 as a Navigator: a private nonprofit or not-for-profit
10 organization, an industry association, an administrative
11 entity under the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity
12 Act, a community action agency, or a public or private
13 educational institution.

14 "Participant" means an individual who:

15 (1) is an Illinois resident;

16 (2) was an unemployed or underemployed individual
17 immediately before being hired by the employer;

18 (3) served a sentence of incarceration in a State or
19 federal prison that (i) ends not more than 10 years before
20 the date the employee is accepted by a Navigator to
21 participate in the program and (ii) ends or is expected to
22 end no later than 12 months after the employee is accepted
23 by a Navigator to participate in the program; and

24 (4) has been accepted by a Navigator to participate in
25 the program.

26 "Program" means the Securing All Futures through Equitable

1 Reinvestment (SAFER) Communities Wage Reimbursement Pilot
2 Program created in this Act.

3 "Underemployed individual" means an individual who:

4 (1) works part-time but desires full-time employment;

5 (2) works for wages not commensurate with the
6 individual's demonstrated level of educational or skill
7 achievement; or

8 (3) is employed and is eligible for assistance under
9 Section 6 of the Energy Assistance Act.

10 "Unemployed individual" means an individual who is without
11 a job and who wants and is available for work. The
12 determination of whether an individual is without a job, for
13 purposes of this definition, shall be made in accordance with
14 the criteria used by the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the
15 United States Department of Labor or as required by the
16 relevant funding source and set forth in the Notice of Funding
17 Opportunities.

18 "Wage reimbursement" means the amount awarded by the
19 Department to a Navigator to compensate the employer for the
20 employer's costs of employment for each participant hired by
21 the employer.

22 Section 15. Powers of the Department. The Department is
23 granted and shall have all the powers necessary or convenient
24 to carry out the purposes and provisions of this Act,
25 including, but not limited to, the power and authority to:

1 (1) adopt rules that are necessary and appropriate for
2 the administration of this Act;

3 (2) establish forms for applications, notifications,
4 contracts, or any other agreements needed to implement
5 this Act;

6 (3) accept applications for the program under this Act
7 at any time during the year and require that the
8 applications be submitted through the Internet or by any
9 other electronic means;

10 (4) provide guidance and assistance to Navigators for
11 the purpose of carrying out this Act and cooperate with
12 Navigators to promote, foster, and support job creation in
13 the State;

14 (5) enter into agreements and memoranda of
15 understanding with agencies of the federal government,
16 units of local government, universities, research
17 foundations or institutions, regional economic development
18 corporations, not-for-profit organizations, or other
19 organizations for the purpose of administering this Act;

20 (6) gather information about Navigators for the
21 purpose of making any designations or certifications in
22 furtherance of the purposes of this Act;

23 (7) provide for sufficient personnel to adequately
24 discharge the Department's duties and responsibilities
25 described in this Act from any funds appropriated by the
26 General Assembly for the administration of this Act; and

1 (8) require Navigators, upon written request, to issue
2 any necessary authorization to the appropriate federal,
3 State, or local authority or any other person for the
4 release to the Department of information requested by the
5 Department, including, but not limited to, financial
6 reports, returns, or records relating to the Navigators or
7 to the amount of the wage reimbursement allowable under
8 this Act.

9 Section 20. Securing All Futures through Equitable
10 Reinvestment (SAFER) Communities Wage Reimbursement Pilot
11 Program.

12 (a) The Department shall, subject to appropriation, create
13 a program to award grants to Navigators for the purposes
14 described in this Section.

15 (b) The Department shall award grants to Navigators for
16 the following purposes:

17 (1) providing wage reimbursements to employers that
18 hire participants, as provided in Sections 25 and 30;

19 (2) collaborating with employers to support
20 participants who require on-the-job experience to gain job
21 skills, develop a work history, and begin a network for
22 entering the workforce; and

23 (3) providing barrier reduction funding, including,
24 but not limited to, transportation, housing, child care,
25 and technology services to participants, as needed.

1 (c) The Department may also award grants for the following
2 purposes to Navigators who are eligible to receive grants
3 under subsection (b):

4 (1) establishing retention coaching programs that
5 support worker retention by continuing the services
6 described in subparagraph (3) of subsection (b) for one
7 year after job placement, as needed; and

8 (2) supporting participants who aspire to participate
9 in additional workforce development, training, and
10 technical skills programs and opportunities.

11 (d) Navigators shall use the Department's system of record
12 to maintain a record of all participants who are eligible for
13 the Program. Navigators shall verify each applicant's
14 employment and conviction history to determine whether the
15 applicant is eligible for participation in the program.
16 Navigators shall notify applicants by email of the denial or
17 approval of the application. Navigators may also send a
18 physical copy of the denial or approval by first-class mail if
19 the application indicates that email is not the applicant's
20 preferred method of communication. Each denial letter issued
21 under this subsection shall state the reason why the
22 individual's application is being denied. Navigators shall
23 submit to the Department a record of each applicant's denial
24 or approval. Navigators shall email qualified participants an
25 electronic certification of eligibility with details about the
26 wage subsidy program, which the participant may present to a

1 prospective employer. The Navigator may also send a physical
2 copy of the certification by first class mail if the
3 application indicates that email is not the applicant's
4 preferred method of communication.

5 Section 25. Eligibility and reporting.

6 (a) The Navigator shall enter into an agreement with the
7 employer of an eligible participant to establish the general
8 terms and conditions of wage reimbursements with respect to
9 that participant. At a minimum, the agreement shall include:

10 (1) the participant's name, social security number or
11 individual taxpayer identification number, job
12 description, and salary;

13 (2) the physical address of the workplace at which the
14 participant is based;

15 (3) the negotiated reimbursement rate for the wage the
16 Navigator would receive under this Act with respect to the
17 participant listed on the application; and

18 (4) any other information required by the Department.

19 (b) Wage reimbursements provided to employers must not
20 directly or indirectly assist, promote, or deter union
21 organizing.

22 (c) Navigators shall submit monthly reports in the form
23 and manner required by the Department that include the
24 employment status of each participant.

1 Section 30. Wage reimbursement.

2 (a) An employer may enter into a wage reimbursement
3 agreement under Section 25 for each participant who is
4 employed by the employer as a full-time employee for a full
5 calendar month as of the date the agreement is entered into,
6 provided that the following conditions are met:

7 (1) the participant shall be provided benefits and
8 working conditions at the same level and to the same
9 extent as other employees who have been employed by the
10 employer for a similar length of time and do the same type
11 of work as the participant;

12 (2) starting from the date of hire of the participant,
13 the employer shall maintain or increase its total number
14 of full-time Illinois employees; and

15 (3) the employer shall pay the participant a wage
16 that, when annualized, meets or exceeds the average wage
17 paid by the employer to other employees who have been
18 employed by the employer for a similar length of time and
19 do the same type of work as the participant.

20 (b) The wage reimbursement received by an employer shall
21 be 50% of the wages earned by each participant as a result of
22 his or her employment with the employer. However, if the
23 participant's primary job site is located in a
24 disproportionately impacted area, then the wage reimbursement
25 shall be 75% of the wages earned by that participant. No
26 employer shall receive a wage reimbursement for a particular

1 participant for more than 12 consecutive months.

2 Section 35. Data collection and reporting. For years in
3 which it receives an appropriation for purposes of this Act,
4 the Department shall make publicly available an annual report
5 on the use, outcomes, and impact of the program described in
6 this Act, including, but not limited to, the total number of
7 participants hired under the program, disaggregated by
8 categories of race, age, gender, hourly wage, length of job
9 retention, recidivism status, job location by region, and
10 employment industry.

11 Section 40. Awareness promotion of the pilot program. The
12 Department of Corrections shall implement procedures to
13 promote awareness and participation in the program among
14 eligible persons, including, but not limited to, the
15 following:

16 (1) The Department of Corrections shall ensure that
17 the wardens or superintendents of all correctional
18 institutions and facilities visibly post information about
19 the availability and registration process for the program
20 in all common areas of their respective institutions, and
21 shall broadcast the same via in-house institutional
22 information television channels. The Department of
23 Corrections shall ensure that updated information is
24 distributed in a timely, visible, and accessible manner.

1 (2) The Department of Corrections shall ensure that
2 each incarcerated individual, upon release as a committed
3 person on parole, mandatory supervised release, aftercare
4 release, final discharge, or pardon, shall be provided
5 with written information about the availability and
6 registration process for the program.

7 (3) The Department of Corrections shall provide to
8 each parole office in this State information about the
9 availability and application process for the program,
10 which shall be posted in a visible and accessible manner.

11 (4) The Department of Corrections shall distribute
12 written information about the availability and application
13 process for the program to the Community Support Advisory
14 Councils of the Department of Corrections for use in
15 re-entry programs across this State.

16 Section 45. Funding. The implementation of this Act is
17 subject to appropriation.

18 Section 50. Rulemaking authority. Upon an appropriation
19 for the Program, the Department may adopt rules that are
20 necessary to implement and administer this Act.

21 Section 55. Repeal. This Act is repealed on December 31,
22 2035.

1 Section 90. The Illinois Administrative Procedure Act is
2 amended by adding Section 5-45.65 as follows:

3 (5 ILCS 100/5-45.65 new)

4 Sec. 5-45.65. Emergency rulemaking; Securing All Futures
5 through Equitable Reinvestment (SAFER) Communities Act. To
6 provide for the expeditious and timely implementation of the
7 Securing All Futures through Equitable Reinvestment (SAFER)
8 Communities Act, emergency rules implementing that Act may be
9 adopted in accordance with Section 5-45 by the Department of
10 Commerce and Economic Opportunity. The adoption of emergency
11 rules authorized by Section 5-45 and this Section is deemed to
12 be necessary for the public interest, safety, and welfare.

13 This Section is repealed one year after the effective date
14 of this amendatory Act of the 104th General Assembly.

15 Section 99. Effective date. This Act takes effect upon
16 becoming law.