

William J. Sabol,
“Local Labor Market Conditions and
Post-Prison Employment: Evidence
From Ohio”

Comments by: Bruce A. Weinberg



NBER

www.bruceweinberg.net

Three Main Points

1. Strong labor markets raise employment of people released from prison
2. Training programs do not have any measurable benefits on employment
3. People with better pre-prison employment records are more likely to be employed after release

Labor Market Effects

- These results are very compelling
- The story is believable and broadly consistent with other work
- The estimates are also remarkably strong (e.g. hold up with county fixed effects) even despite only a few years of data
- But, hard to manipulate local labor markets

Training Programs

- Appealing from a policy perspective
 - Clear how to implement
- A lot of work showing small benefits of non-prison training programs
- Prison programs could be better or worse, but weak benefits consistent with other programs

Pre-Prison Employment

- Estimates show large relationship between employment before and after prison
- ... but is this relationship causal?
- People may retain skills, including basics like being responsible on the job
- But people who were more employable before probably still are after release
- Best not to view estimates as causal

Conclusions

- Very interesting paper on an important, policy relevant topic
- Believable results
- Great use of administrative data
 - It is already on hard drives and contains a wealth of information!