Employment Outcomes of Justice-Involved Individuals in Louisiana

Causes and Consequences of Criminal and Delinquent Acts

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Executive Summary

The Causes and Consequences of Criminal and Delinquent Acts (CCCDA) report series is produced annually as part of Louisiana's Foundational Integrated Research System for Transformation (LA FIRST) (La. Rev. Stat. § 17:3138.12). The goal of this report series is to provide policymakers with data-driven insights into the justice system and the populations affected by it. While the first CCCDA report provided a broad overview of Louisiana's justice system and examined pathways between juvenile and adult justice involvement, the 2026 report focuses on a specific issue that is critical for successful reintegration: the employment outcomes of justice-involved individuals in Louisiana.

Employment plays an important role in the transition back into the community following justice involvement. Most individuals who experience incarceration or supervision eventually return to their communities, and their ability to secure stable employment can shape long-term economic and social outcomes. In Louisiana alone, more than 13,000 adults were released from state custody in 2023, while thousands of youth are supervised or placed in custody through the juvenile justice system each year. At the same time, this population often face multiple barriers to employment, including limited work histories, lower levels of educational attainment, and the stigma associated with a criminal record. Understanding how these individuals engage with the labor market is important for both economic and public safety policy discussions.

This report provides an initial descriptive analysis of employment outcomes among two groups in Louisiana: individuals with a history of involvement with the Office of Juvenile Justice (OJJ) and adults discharged from parole or good time parole supervision under the Department of Public Safety and Corrections (DPS&C). To conduct this analysis, we link administrative records from OJJ and DPS&C with employment data from Louisiana Works (LW), which include Unemployment Insurance (UI) wage records reported by employers between 2014 and 2024. Using these linked data, the report examines patterns in annual employment, wages, and industry of employment, as well as differences across demographic characteristics and patterns of justice involvement.

Several consistent patterns emerge from the analysis. First, a large share of justice-involved individuals is not observed in formal employment during many of the years examined. Among both adults discharged from parole and individuals with juvenile justice involvement, a substantial proportion do not appear in UI wage records during the study period, suggesting that they may be unemployed, have left Louisiana, or be working in sectors not covered by the data. Among those who are employed, full-year employment, or employment in all four quarters of a year, is relatively uncommon. Instead, many individuals experience intermittent employment, characterized by periods of work followed by periods without recorded employment.

Second, wages vary substantially depending on employment stability. Individuals who secure full-year employment earn significantly higher wages than those working only part of the year. However, the majority of employed individuals fall into the part-year employment category, where annual earnings tend to be very low. For many individuals, these levels of earnings are unlikely to provide stable economic support. Even among full-year workers, wage growth over time appears more limited than what is typically observed in the broader labor market, suggesting potential constraints in upward mobility.

Third, employment among justice-involved individuals is concentrated in a relatively small number of industries. Sectors such as food services and drinking places and administrative and support services account for a large share of employment for this population. These industries often offer entry points into the labor market but tend to be associated with lower wages and higher turnover. A smaller portion of individuals have accessed higher-paying industries, including construction and sectors related to oil and gas. These findings suggest that while employment opportunities exist, access to higher-paying and more stable industries may be uneven across the population.

Finally, employment outcomes vary by demographic characteristics and by patterns of justice involvement. Factors that suggest prior work experience or higher levels of education are generally associated with better employment outcomes. In contrast, individuals with more intensive justice involvement, such as multiple incarceration episodes or custody placements during youth, tend to experience weaker employment attachment. Differences are also observed across demographic groups, indicating that broader structural factors may shape labor market outcomes for this population.

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Acknowledgments

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1. Introduction

As part of Act 394 of the 2023 Regular Session of the Louisiana Legislature, Louisiana's Foundational Integrated Research System for Transformation (LA FIRST) was created as an initiative of the Louisiana Board of Regents (BOR) to be administered by the Kathleen Blanco Public Policy Center. LA FIRST is commissioned by the Legislature to produce three annual legislative research reports: (1) Launch Louisiana, (2) Louisiana's Employment Outcomes, and (3) Causes and Consequences of Criminal and Delinquent Acts (CCCDA).

The first CCCDA report (Leyton et al. 2025) began with a broad overview of the justice system in Louisiana and a brief review of the literature on the causes and consequences of criminal and delinquent acts. In the findings section, the report used linked administrative records to examine three key areas: convicted offenses resulting in custody or supervision by the adult corrections system and the characteristics of individuals involved; trends and characteristics of admissions to the juvenile justice system; and the progression from involvement with the juvenile justice system to involvement with the adult corrections system. That initial report relied on administrative data collected by the Office of Juvenile Justice and the Department of Public Safety and Corrections.

This 2026 report builds on that foundation but focuses on a specific topic that is particularly important for the state: employment outcomes among justice-involved individuals. By incorporating employment records from Louisiana Works, this report provides an initial analysis of how individuals with justice system involvement fare in the labor market and shows trends in employment outcomes across ages and over time.

1.1 Scope of the problem

Justice system involvement can shape individuals' social and economic outcomes both during and long after their contact with the justice system. Adult offending and incarceration remain significant issues in Louisiana, which has the second-highest imprisonment rate in the country (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2023). However, incarceration is not a permanent condition for most individuals. The majority of incarcerated people eventually return to their communities, with national estimates indicating that at least 95 percent of prisoners are released at some point (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2004). In Louisiana alone, 13,075 adults were released from state custody in 2023 (LADPS&C 2025).

Similar patterns are present in the juvenile justice system. Although many justice-involved youth are supervised in the community, a substantial number experience detention or placement and eventually transition back to their communities. In the fourth quarter of 2024, 480 juveniles were in secure placement, while 1,802 were on probation in the community (Office of Juvenile Justice 2024). Together, these

figures highlight the large number of justice-involved individuals living in Louisiana communities and underscore the importance of understanding their social and economic outcomes.

Employment following justice involvement is widely recognized as a key component of successful reintegration. Empirical evidence supports this relationship: individuals who do not obtain work after release are significantly more likely to reoffend (Nally et al. 2014). Beyond simply securing employment, stable and sustained work can play a stronger role in supporting desistance from crime, as it provides consistent income, daily structure, and stronger connections to conventional social institutions. Short-term or sporadic employment may not provide the same stabilizing effects and may reflect persistent labor market barriers for individuals with criminal records.

Despite the importance of reintegration, justice-involved individuals continue to face substantial economic barriers. Prior research consistently finds that delinquent and adult criminal records are associated with an increased likelihood of unemployment following release from supervision or custody (Carter 2019; Nally et al. 2014; van der Geest et al. 2016). As a result, individuals with justice system involvement are disproportionately likely to experience poverty and financial hardship (Western 2019). This concern is particularly acute in Louisiana, which ranks 49th nationally in poverty (United Health Foundation 2024).

Although justice involvement affects thousands of individuals each year, and employment plays a critical role in long-term outcomes, longitudinal research on the employment trajectories of justice-involved people in Louisiana remains limited.

1.2 This report

The goal of this report is to describe employment outcomes among justice-involved individuals in Louisiana, with separate analyses for those with a history of involvement in the juvenile and adult systems.

This report examines four key areas of employment outcomes:

- Trends in annual employment,
- Trends in real annual wages,
- Distribution of employment across industries, including NAICS supersectors and subsectors, and
- Differences in employment and wage outcomes by type of employment, demographic, and justice involvement characteristics.

To achieve these goals, we link administrative data from three Louisiana state agencies: the Office of Juvenile Justice (OJJ), the Department of Public Safety and Corrections (DPS&C), and Louisiana Works (LW). The Methods section

provides a detailed description of each dataset and the data integration process.

While this report does not attempt to establish causal relationships or identify the specific determinants of employment success, it provides a data-driven overview of employment patterns among justice-involved individuals. Our goal is to inform discussions about how this population engages with the labor market and how employment experiences vary across demographic characteristics and patterns of justice involvement. Understanding these patterns can help the state better support successful reintegration. Future reports should explore these dynamics in greater depth, including testing causal relationships and examining the underlying mechanisms.

This report proceeds as follows. The next section provides a brief review of the literature on employment outcomes following justice involvement. We then describe the data and methods used in the analysis. The findings section presents employment outcomes for two populations: adults discharged from parole or good time parole in Louisiana and individuals with a history of juvenile justice involvement. For each group, we examine employment attachment over time, wage outcomes, and the industries in which individuals are employed. The report concludes with a discussion of key findings and next steps for future research.

2. Brief literature review

2.1 Theoretical perspectives on employment outcomes following justice involvement

Before turning to the empirical findings, this section reviews key theoretical perspectives that help explain how justice involvement may influence employment outcomes. Several theories offer insight into the challenges individuals with justice system involvement face in finding and maintaining stable employment following adjudication. Here, we focus on three: human capital theory, the age-graded theory of informal social control, and labeling theory.

Human capital theory. Rooted in economic literature, human capital theory conceptualizes education and training as investments that increase an individual's productivity and economic growth (Becker 1994). From this perspective, justice involvement, particularly incarceration and juvenile detention, could disrupt educational attainment and the accumulation of work experience. As a result, individuals may face reduced employment opportunities because they have fewer chances to build this human capital.

Age graded theory of informal social control. Sampson and Laub's age-graded theory of informal social control proposes that individuals experience turning points

over the life course that strengthen their bonds to prosocial norms and institutions (Laub and Sampson 1993). Turning points such as securing stable employment, education, and family formation increase informal social control by creating stakes in conformity and reinforcing prosocial behavior. Justice involvement during youth may disrupt access to these turning points, particularly education and stable employment, thereby weakening individuals' attachment to conventional institutions. As a result, justice-involved individuals may face greater difficulty obtaining and maintaining stable employment in adulthood.

Labeling theory. Lastly, labeling theory from the criminology literature highlights structural barriers to employment following detention or incarceration (Akers et al. 2017). According to this perspective, individuals who are labeled as "delinquent" or "criminal" may experience negative social reactions that shape how others perceive and treat them. These labels can influence employers' hiring decisions, as criminal records or known justice involvement may signal risk or untrustworthiness. While the juvenile justice system attempts to reduce these long-term consequences by sealing records and avoiding criminal terminology, the stigma associated with justice involvement may still affect individuals' self-perceptions and opportunities. For adults, labeling is often more difficult to overcome because criminal records are more accessible and employers frequently require background checks or disclosure of prior convictions.

2.2 Employment outcomes among justice-involved individuals

In this section, we review relevant literature on employment outcomes among justice-involved individuals. These studies provide context for our analysis, help inform our approach to the data and methods used in this report, and offer insights into the types of employment patterns that prior research has documented.

Justice-involved individuals are disproportionately economically disadvantaged, with lower levels of educational attainment and fewer marketable job skills than the general population. Many also experience mental and physical health disabilities; in fact, a study about prisoners in 2004 revealed that nearly 25 percent had a diagnosed mental health condition (Raphael 2010). These overlapping disadvantages make securing and maintaining employment difficult even prior to contact with the justice system. For example, a study in Illinois, Ohio, and Texas found that only two-thirds of former male prisoners were employed during the six months preceding incarceration (Visher et al. 2008). Other evidence suggests even lower levels of labor market attachment before incarceration. In a study of people released from federal prisons, only about one-third of the population were employed 12 quarters prior to their prison admission (Carson 2021). Similarly, a Washington State report examining incarcerated young adults found that only 52.7 percent of offenders had any UI wage record prior to incarceration, and among those who had one, the median annual wage was $3,100 (Hough 2016).

Following justice involvement, employment prospects often deteriorate further, and in some cases, limit any access to formal labor markets. For example, a study of people with prior incarceration for property offenses in Washington state reported an unemployment rate of 40.7 percent, nearly six times higher than the statewide unemployment rate at that time (6.75 percent) (Landon 2015). While some individuals do obtain employment after release, available jobs are frequently characterized by instability, low wages, and poor working conditions. In a mixed-methods study including 22 individuals returning from prison, it was found that post-release employment was typically low-wage and high-turnover, offering limited informal social control or economic stability to deter recidivism (Harding et al. 2019a). Similar findings have been documented in other contexts. In Canada, Sheppard and Ricciardelli (2020) found that formerly incarcerated individuals often obtained low-wage, non-gratifying jobs despite participation in pre-employment programming (Sheppard and Ricciardelli 2020). Using data from Indiana, it was found that nearly half of employed released offenders earned annual incomes below $5,000 (Nally et al. 2013). Likewise, a study of employment during parole in Michigan found that parolees were predominantly unemployed, and when employed, earnings were generally low due to part-time, sporadic, or low-wage work arrangements (Seim and Harding 2020).

Although a substantial body of research examines the relationship between specific forms of justice involvement or program participation and employment outcomes, fewer studies document the broader employment patterns experienced by justice-involved populations. This gap is partly attributable to the complexity of these patterns, as individuals often cycle in and out of the justice system or engage in informal or undocumented employment. Evidence from Michigan illustrates this instability: Labriola found that 40 percent of parolees experienced an arrest within two years of beginning employment, and more than 25 percent returned to prison during the same period (Labriola 2020).

Among the studies that document the likelihood of being employed after justice involvement, Washington State's Correctional Industries Programming evaluation found that between 56 and 66 percent of individuals released from prison secured employment, with an average time to first job of 124 to 142 days (Taniguchi and Patel 2025). Those employed worked an average of 17 to 21 hours per week (Taniguchi and Patel 2025). In a study among people released from federal prison, authors found that employment did not exceed 40 percent in any quarter of the four years studied (Carson 2021). In Michigan, any quarterly employment after release peaked at 43 percent for white individuals and only 29 percent for black individuals (Harding et al. 2019b).

Another consistent pattern among employment outcomes is that even when employed, justice-involved people earn mean wages below the general population. A Washington State study focusing on property offenders reported that during the study period (2000–2015), average full-time wages in the general population were $24.57 per hour, while employed prior offenders earned an average of $13.66 per

hour, nearly half the statewide average (Landon 2015). In Michigan, while median earnings across all workers were $40,935, parolees worked in industries where the median wages were $31,782, $12,531, and $21,663 per year (Harding et al. 2019a). In Illinois, over a 3-year period, 75 percent of prison releasees made $13,735 per year or less (Reichert et al. 2023).

The industries in which this population is employed help explain both job instability and low wages. In Illinois, the most common employment sectors for work among formerly incarcerated individuals were administrative and support services, waste management and remediation services, and accommodation and food services. These sectors ranked among the five lowest-paying industries in the study (Reichert et al. 2023). Accommodation and food services is also a disproportionately common employment industry for justice-involved individuals relative to the general workforce. In Michigan, during the first three years following release, 16.5 percent of parolees were employed in accommodation and food services, compared to only 9.1 percent of workers statewide (Harding et al. 2019a).

Jobs accessible to individuals with criminal records are frequently physically demanding or may have other undesirable characteristics, reflecting what has been described as a labor market dynamic of seeking a "good worker for a bad job" (Griffith et al. 2019). This pattern could reflect common perceptions, right or wrong, among employers about the suitability of individuals with a criminal history to fill certain types of jobs. Temporary employment and day-labor industries are often more accessible, as they typically involve limited customer interaction and lower barriers to hiring individuals with criminal records (Griffith et al. 2019). However, such employment rarely aligns with long-term career goals. Qualitative evidence from Canada indicates that formerly incarcerated individuals often view these jobs as short-term necessities during initial release or parole, with aspirations to transition into more stable or rewarding employment over time (Sheppard and Ricciardelli 2020).

Taken together, the evidence presented in this section suggests that a substantial share of the justice-involved population is concentrated in what the literature describes as the secondary labor market (Ahn et al. 2023). This concept is used to describe employment characterized by low pay, limited benefits, unstable working conditions, and a lack of clear job ladders or opportunities for advancement. Workers in the secondary labor market experience turnover rates approximately six times higher than those in the primary labor market and are about ten times more likely to experience unemployment (Ahn et al. 2023).

2.3 Differences by demographic characteristics

Differences in employment outcomes among justice-involved individuals may also reflect demographic patterns related to race and gender. In the United States, Black individuals are incarcerated at significantly higher rates than White individuals and also earn less on average in the labor market (Craigie et al. 2020). These patterns are shaped by a range of factors, including differences in educational opportunities, labor market access, and hiring practices. In addition, some studies suggest that Black individuals may face discrimination in hiring processes, which may further affect employment prospects after justice involvement (Leasure and Kaminski 2021). When combined with the challenges associated with having a criminal record, these factors may create additional barriers to stable employment.

Research has also shown that race and criminal records may jointly shape reentry experiences. For example, a study found that Black and Latino individuals often face greater difficulties in the labor market after release (Lyons and Pettit 2011). This pattern has sometimes been described as "racialized reentry," where the stigma of a criminal record interacts with existing labor market barriers. Evidence from a study in Boston found that roughly half of individuals released from prison were unemployed in any given month, and among those who were employed many earned wages below the poverty level (Western and Sirois 2018). In that study, White men were more likely to obtain higher paying jobs in the construction sector after release.

Sex may also shape employment outcomes among justice-involved populations. Females tend to offend less frequently, commit less serious offenses, and desist from offending earlier than males (Flower 2010). Men also tend to have longer criminal careers and are more likely to be involved in serious offenses (Flower 2010). National statistics show that violent offenses represent the most serious conviction for 64.2 percent of male prisoners compared with 45.5 percent of female prisoners (Carson and Kluckow 2023). These differences in offense patterns and criminal careers may contribute to variation in employment outcomes between men and women after release.

2.4 Differences by offense characteristics

Prior research suggests that the severity of an offense may negatively affect employability. In a 2015 study using Amazon's Mechanical Turk, participants were asked to act as employers in a hypothetical hiring scenario. The results indicate that employers expressed greater concern about hiring individuals with more severe offenses, often due to perceptions of increased "dangerousness" and assumptions about lower skill levels and personal characteristics (Cerda et al. 2015). However, other research finds that employers do not always distinguish strongly across offense types. In a nationwide survey experiment using fictional job applicants with different felony convictions, respondents evaluated applicants with aggravated assault convictions similarly to those with drug distribution

convictions (DeWitt and Denver 2020).

The relationship between offense type and employment outcomes following incarceration is complex and difficult to isolate. Individuals convicted of different types of offenses often differ in other characteristics in ways that may also influence their labor market prospects, such as prior work history, education, substance use, or involvement in gangs. As a result, separating the independent effect of offense type from these related factors remains challenging. Some studies suggest that individuals involved in violent offending may exhibit behavioral patterns that complicate labor market integration. For example, research on justice-involved youth finds that those with violent offenses are more likely to have a history of aggression, poor problem solving skills, and gang involvement than their nonviolent counterparts (Lai et al. 2016). These characteristics may make it more difficult to secure and maintain stable employment after release.

Differences in recidivism patterns across offense types may also shape employment outcomes, since individuals who return to custody cannot participate in the labor market. National evidence indicates that recidivism rates vary by offense category. In a nine-year follow-up of individuals released from prison, those originally incarcerated for property offenses were the most likely to be arrested again, followed by those with drug offenses, while individuals released for violent offenses had somewhat lower overall rearrest rates (Alper et al. 2018). However, individuals released for violent offenses were more likely to be arrested again for a violent crime. Because repeated justice involvement interrupts employment trajectories and work histories, these differences in recidivism patterns may contribute to variation in observed employment outcomes across offense types.

Some research also suggests that offense type may influence post release earnings among those who secure employment. Evidence from Illinois indicates that individuals convicted of economically motivated and less violent offenses, such as property or drug crimes, experienced larger increases in earnings after leaving incarceration compared with individuals convicted of person related offenses (Jung 2011). One interpretation proposed in the literature is that incarceration may have stronger deterrent effects for economically motivated offenders, who may return to legal employment when opportunities become available.

2.5 **Differences by intensity and timing of justice involvement**

Previous studies have shown that characteristics of justice involvement, such as the intensity or timing of contact with the justice system, can influence employment outcomes. With respect to the length of incarceration, some studies find that individuals who spend longer periods in prison may experience somewhat more favorable labor market outcomes, particularly in the short term. This pattern may reflect greater exposure to rehabilitation and reentry programs

during incarceration, differences in individual characteristics, or aspects of the prison environment itself (Landersø 2015; Jung 2011; Kling 2006). For example, one study examining men who served sentences of less than four years in Illinois prisons found that individuals who served longer sentences had higher post-release employment rates and earnings than those who served shorter sentences (Jung 2011).

The timing of justice involvement may also shape employment trajectories. Longitudinal research following approximately 1,000 adolescents from Rochester, New York from 1988 into adulthood found that individuals who became involved with the justice system at younger ages experienced significantly longer periods of non-employment (Emmert 2019). The study suggests that this pattern reflects processes of cumulative disadvantage or employment stagnation. Individuals incarcerated earlier often entered the justice system before developing stable employment histories and subsequently returned to labor market trajectories that resembled their limited pre-incarceration employment experiences. In contrast, first incarceration between the ages of 23 and 32 was not associated with longer periods of non-employment, suggesting that incarceration during this stage does not substantially worsen employment outcomes relative to individuals' prior labor market histories.

Research has also found that employment outcomes vary by the type of justice involvement (e.g., incarceration versus non-incarceration) (Garin et al. 2025; Capece 2022; Harding et al. 2017; LaForest-Tucker 2024). For example, a study examined the effects of incarceration on wages, self-employment, and tax filing in North Carolina and Ohio and found that incarceration caused short-term drops in economic activity following time in prison, such that a year-long sentence decreases cumulative earnings over 5 years by 13 percent. However, while there was a decrease in cumulative earnings over 5 years, they found no long-run impact of incarceration on earnings or employment after these years (Garin et al. 2025). Another study by the Brennan Center for Justice found that people convicted of felonies and imprisoned had earnings reduced by 52 percent following their release compared to pre-conviction earnings, while those who were convicted of a felony but not imprisoned had their annual wage reduced by only 22 percent (Craigie et al. 2020).

Finally, the timing of release to parole may also influence employment outcomes. Using a quasi-random assignment of interviewers to parole hearings in Pennsylvania, one study examined the relationship between early parole release, recidivism, and employment outcomes. The findings suggest that earlier release to parole had little effect on employment and, in fact, was associated with higher rates of recidivism. When individuals released earlier were compared with those released later, the "age-out" effect of leaving prison at an older age appeared to outweigh any potential benefits of additional time incarcerated in reducing future criminal activity (LaForest-Tucker 2024).

2.6 Differences by education or training program participation

Participation in correctional education, training or work programs, including adult basic education, postsecondary education, vocational training, and correctional industries, has the potential to improve employment prospects after release. For example, evidence from Washington State shows that people who participated in Correctional Industries programs were more likely to find work after leaving custody, found employment more quickly, worked more hours, and earned higher hourly wages (Taniguchi and Patel 2025). These findings highlight the value of examining employment outcomes by program participation. However, such analyses are beyond the scope of the present report. Given the complexity and variation across programs, program-specific impacts will be examined in future LA FIRST reports to better understand which programs are most effective, for whom, and why.

3. Data and methods

3.1 Data

This section discusses the data used in this report from agency partners DPS&C, OJJ, and LW. As discussed in the 2025 CCCDA report (Leyton et al. 2025), data from these agencies are administrative in nature; that is, they are typically used to aid in the administration and management of public programs and to assess the effectiveness of specific programs. However, these data can also be used for policy research when made available through the LA FIRST partnership.

3.1.1 Data from DPS&C

DPS&C uses the Corrections and Justice Unified Network (CAJUN) to record and report activities related to incarceration and supervision of adults in the state. See the 2025 CCCDA report for a detailed discussion of the population recorded in CAJUN. From the shared data, we identified a specific set of tables and variables used for each report. Below, we describe the tables selected for the current report.

Description of selected CAJUN tables

- MASTER: This table includes a record for each individual under DPS&C's custody or supervision. It includes information about their physical, personal, and demographic characteristics. Information on their current status with the agency, including their physical location and supervision level are also included.

- OFFENSE: This table contains information about the offense(s) a person involved with DPS&C was convicted of including the type, statute, and date of offense and sentence length.
- TRANSFER: This table records the locations of individuals under DPS&C's custody or supervision, both current and previous. It includes information on the admission and release dates for each DPS&C involvement an individual has, including incarceration, parole, or probation.

3.1.2 Data from OJJ

OJJ uses the Juvenile Electronic Tracking System (JETS) to collect and maintain data on the youth under their custody or supervision. Detailed information on the population and type of data recorded in JETS can be found in the 2025 CCCDA report. Below, we describe the tables selected for the current report.

Description of selected JETS tables

- Master/Client/Episode: This table contains information about individuals under OJJ's care, such as demographic characteristics, episode, admission, and release dates. An episode is the period between the date an individual was admitted to OJJ's care and the date the individual was released. Each record represents an episode, and an individual can have multiple records when there is more than one episode.
- Legal Disposition: This table includes one record for each delinquency petition for which an individual was placed under OJJ's custody or supervision. Therefore, an individual may have multiple disposition records per episode.

3.1.3 Data from LW

We use 2014 to 2024 data from Louisiana Works (LW) from the state unemployment insurance (UI) system under the LA FIRST data-sharing agreement. These data serve as the primary source for investigating employment outcomes for justice-involved people in this year's report. The UI wage data is composed of records provided by employers, who are required by the state, to report quarterly wages paid to individual employees to determine who qualifies for unemployment benefits and how much they should receive (Habans et al. 2025).

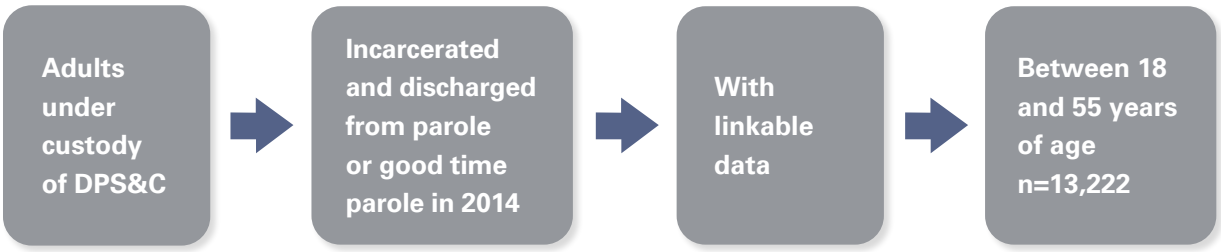
Data from this source include wage records for every justice-involved individual who worked in Louisiana in any job covered by the UI system (generally, this aligns with work that generates a Form W-2 "W2", reporting taxable wages). This means that while the UI system covers records for most of the working population in Louisiana, some of our population might not be observed in wage records if they are federal employees or railroad workers, or working in certain farm or domestic employment, self-employed, or employed as an independent contractor (Habans et al. 2025).

3.2 Population

DPS&C Analysis. Our population includes adults under custody of DPS&C who were discharged from parole or good time parole in 2014 (Figure 1). These discharges, also referred to as case closures, are hereafter collectively referred to as "parole" for the remainder of the report. The population is restricted to individuals with linkable data who were 55 years old or younger, resulting in a final population of 13,222.

Selecting parole discharge, rather than prison release, as the defining event for the DPS&C cohort involved important analytical tradeoffs. In Louisiana, approximately 88 percent of individuals released from prison serve a period of parole supervision based on the authors' calculations. As a result, although individuals are physically outside prison, they remain under correctional supervision and must comply with specific conditions. These conditions often restrict where individuals may live and work and require periodic reporting to a supervising officer. Failure to comply may result in a parole violation and a return to incarceration. The objective of this initial report is to describe employment outcomes among individuals who have fully exited the correctional system. We acknowledge, however, that understanding employment patterns during parole supervision and how those patterns influence both returns to the justice system and outcomes after individuals complete supervision are important areas for future research.

Figure 1. DPS&C: Population definition and inclusion criteria

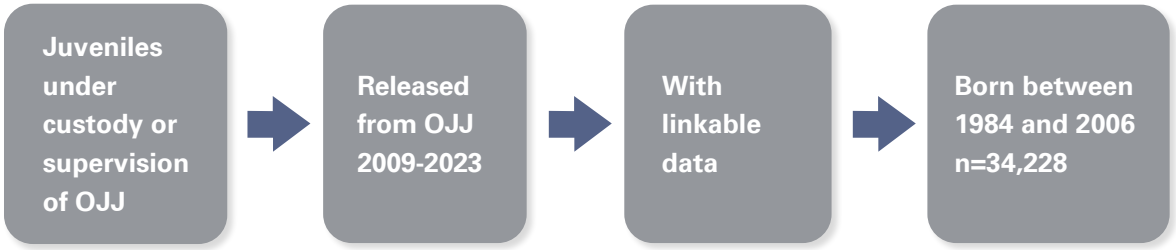


OJJ Analysis. Our study population includes individuals who have ever been under custody or supervision of the Office of Juvenile Justice and were released between 2009 and 2023 (see Figure 2). The sample is restricted to individuals with linkable data who were born between 1984 and 2006, resulting in a final population of 34,228 individuals.

Because our wage data cover a fixed calendar period (2014-2024), individuals are observed for different lengths of time depending on their birth year. For example, individuals who turned 18 in 2024 can only be observed for one year, at that age, within our data window, whereas individuals who turned 18 in 2014 can be observed at that age and at subsequent ages 19, 20, 21, and so on, across the full period through 2024. Similarly, individuals who turned 30 in 2014 are

only observed at age 30 for one year and our reporting of their outcomes ceases in subsequent years 2015, 2016, 2017 and so on as they no longer are part of the study group as they "age out" of our analytical study group. As a result, the number of observable years varies across cohorts and ages. In the findings section, we also discuss an alternative analysis using a smaller cohort that is observed across the same range of ages to assess the robustness of these patterns.

Figure 2. OJJ: Population definition and inclusion criteria



3.3 Main variables

Outcomes. Employment outcomes are the primary focus of this report. We examine three key measures: annual employment status, annual real wages, and primary industry of employment. Annual employment status is defined using UI wage records reported across calendar quarters. Individuals are classified as full-year employed if they have UI wage records in all four quarters of a given year, part-year employed if they have records in one to three quarters, and not observed working if they have no UI wage records during that year. Annual nominal wages are calculated by summing all UI-reported earnings across quarters within a calendar year for each individual. These nominal wages are then converted to real wages using the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and are expressed in 2024 dollars. CPI data were obtained from the Federal Reserve Economic Data (FRED) system, which compiles data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and other public sources. All wage values reported in the tables are rounded to the nearest ten dollars. Finally, each individual is assigned a single primary industry of employment per year. For individuals with earnings in multiple industries within the same year, the primary industry is defined as the industry in which the individual earned the highest total wages. Industries are classified using three-digit North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes.

Demographic characteristics. Each outcome is analyzed by key demographic characteristics, including sex, race, and age. For individuals in the DPS&C population, we also incorporate self-reported educational attainment as recorded in administrative records.

Offense characteristics. For the OJJ population, offense characteristics are defined based on the most severe delinquent act ever adjudicated and are categorized by type (violent, property, status, and drug offenses). For the DPS&C population,

offense characteristics measures include drug-ever, never drug, violent-ever, and never violent.

Intensity and timing of justice involvement. For the OJJ population, justice involvement measures include the number of distinct episodes with OJJ and whether the individual was ever placed in custody or was supervised exclusively in the community. For the DPS&C population, justice involvement measures include age at first incarceration and whether the individual had a single or multiple incarceration episodes.

3.4 Analytical strategy

For OJJ, we present results by single year of age and by broader age groups to highlight differences across key developmental stages and improve interpretability of our findings. For DPS&C, we present results by calendar year and for the grouped years 2014-2016 and 2022-2024 to describe trends over time. Across both populations, our analyses rely on descriptive statistics to summarize key measures, including proportions and distributional indicators such as the 25th percentile, 50th percentile (median), and 75th percentile.

4. Findings

4.1 Employment outcomes of adults discharged from parole in Louisiana

In this section, we present the employment outcomes of individuals discharged from parole in 2014 who were previously under custody of the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections (DPS&C). We examine their outcomes over time (from 2014 to 2024), focusing on employment status, annual wages, and primary industry of employment, and present the analysis by year and selected demographic and justice-involvement characteristics. The panel used for this analysis is balanced, meaning individuals remain in the sample for the full observation period regardless of changes in their circumstances. We do not remove individuals who may have returned to incarceration or those who may have moved to a different state or died during the observation period; as a result, these individuals may appear among those not observed in the Unemployment Insurance (UI) wage records in a given year.

4.1.1 Population and matching outcomes

The study population consists of adults who completed parole or good time parole supervision in 2014 and had linkable data (N=14,106). Both groups are referred to collectively as "parole" throughout the report. Individuals older than 55 at release (n=882) and those younger than 18 (n=2) were excluded, resulting in

a final study population of 13,222 individuals. The analysis focuses on individuals whose release included a period of parole supervision because these represent the majority of releases in Louisiana. In our study population, about 75 percent of people had spent two years or less under parole before their 2014 discharge. Although individuals may work while on parole, supervision requirements may constrain employment opportunities. The objective of this report is to assess employment outcomes after individuals have fully exited the correctional system. Future reports can extend the analysis to include employment experiences during parole supervision and examine how those experiences might shape outcomes following complete system exit.

Parole discharges in 2014 were then linked to Louisiana UI wage records. Of the study population, 10,022 adults could be linked to at least one UI wage record at some point between 2014 and 2024, while 3,200 individuals (24.2 percent) could not be linked to any UI wage record during this period. Linkage rates varied across demographic groups. As shown in Table 1, the likelihood of being linked to a UI wage record varies by sex, race, and age at discharge. Males (75.2 percent), Black individuals (75.4 percent), and those discharged between ages 30 and 39 (79.4 percent) show the highest rates of linkage. In contrast, individuals discharged at ages 18 to 24 had the lowest likelihood of being linked to any UI wage record (59.2 percent), which may reflect continued school enrollment or delayed entry into the formal labor market.

Table 1. Linkage to Louisiana UI wage records among people discharged from parole in 2014, by sex, race, and age at discharge

	Matched to any UI wage record (%)
Sex	
Female	71.1
Male	75.2
Race	
Black	75.4
White	73.9
Age at discharge	
18-24	59.2
25-29	74.6
30-39	79.4
40-49	75.6
50-55	63.5

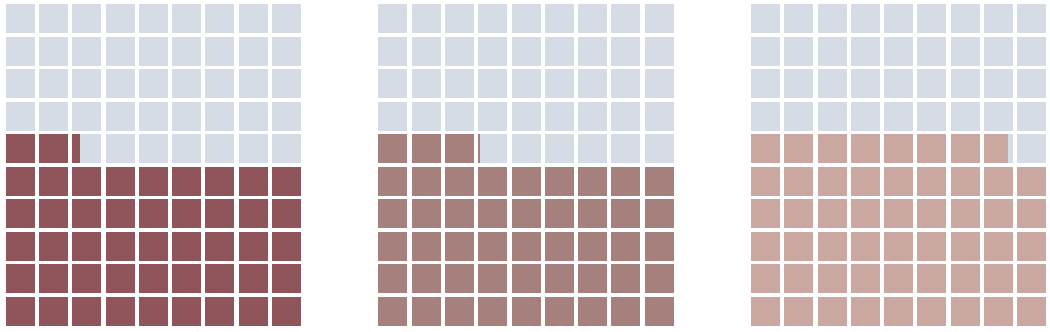
Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.

4.1.2 Employment patterns 1-3 years after parole discharge

In this section, we use the quarterly employment data to describe the most common employment patterns among individuals discharged from parole or good time parole in 2014. For simplicity, we use the term "parole" to refer to both types of supervision throughout the remainder of this section. Examining employment outcomes one, two, and three years after their discharge, we find that approximately 42.4 percent, 53.1 percent, and 58.8 percent of individuals, respectively, had at least one UI wage record during these periods (see Figure 3). These findings suggest that some individuals who do not secure employment shortly after discharge may nonetheless enter the labor market in subsequent years.

Our results are in line with reports from other states. In Illinois, similar results were found with only 54 percent of previously incarcerated people reporting wages for at least one quarter three years after their release (Reichert et al. 2023). It is important to note that the mentioned report measured employment during the 3-year period after release from prison, while we measure it after discharge from parole.

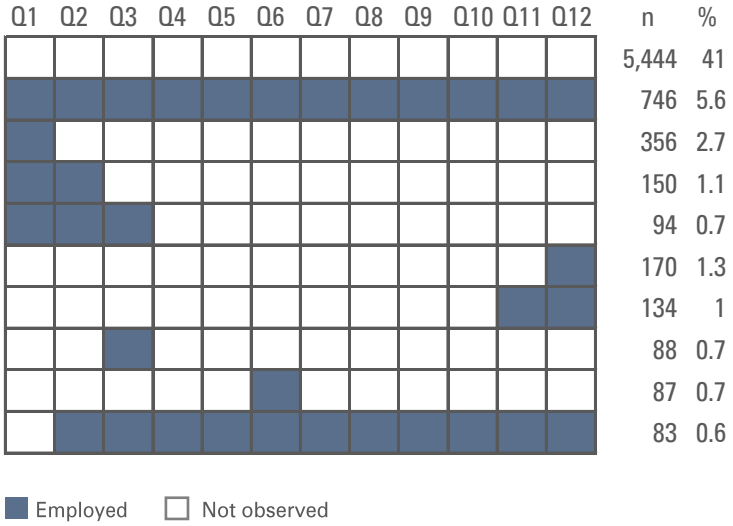
Figure 3. Any employment 1, 2, and 3 years after parole discharge



Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.

Focusing on the first three years following parole discharge, we examine the most common sequential patterns of quarterly employment to assess the timing and stability of labor market attachment, including whether individuals work only shortly after discharge, only at later stages, or move in and out of employment. As shown in Figure 4, we find substantial variation in post-discharge employment trajectories. Overall, 41.2 percent of individuals do not report any employment during the twelve quarters following discharge, while 5.6 percent are employed in all twelve quarters. In addition, approximately 600 individuals work during the first one to three quarters after discharge and then exit employment, suggesting that early employment does not necessarily last.

Figure 4. 10 most common quarterly employment patterns three years after parole discharge



Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.

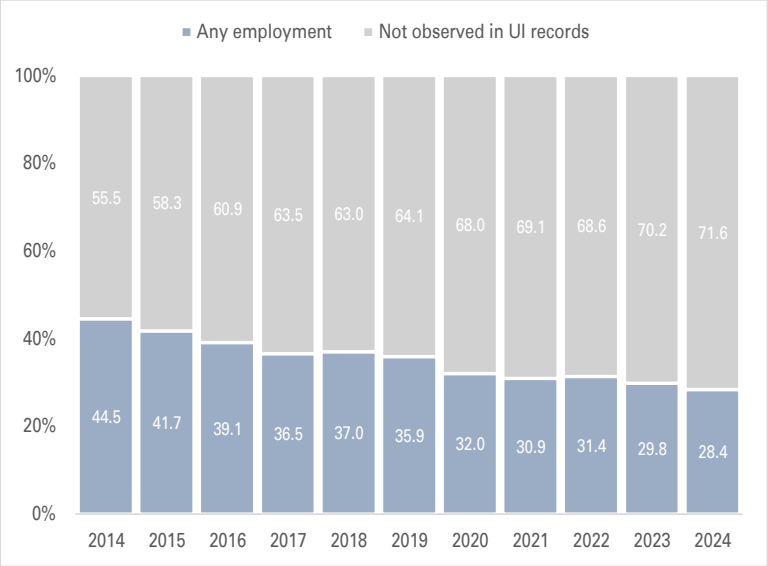
4.1.3 How does employment attachment change over time for people discharged from parole?

Annual employment

For the remainder of the report, we focus on annual employment and annual earnings (wages) during the ten years following discharge. We begin by examining the proportion of individuals who were employed for at least one quarter within a given calendar year, with results presented by year starting in 2014 (see Figure 5). A substantial share of individuals (more than 50 percent) do not have any UI wage record in a given year, suggesting that many are either not working in Louisiana's formal labor market or not working at all. The findings also indicate a steady decline in observed employment over time. In 2014, 44.5 percent of individuals discharged from parole were employed for at least one quarter. Ten years later, in 2024, only 28.4 percent were employed for at least one quarter.

The low proportion of individuals discharged from parole who are working in the formal labor market may reflect the negative effects of incarceration on later employment prospects, including the disruption of work histories and the stigma associated with a criminal record. It could also be related to recidivism and to substantial labor market detachment among this population even prior to incarceration. For example, a study examining defendants in Ohio and North Carolina found that fewer than half had any employer reported W-2 wage earnings in the years preceding their case, and only 41 percent earned more than $500 (Garin et al. 2025). Furthermore, data from state prisons show that less than 50 percent of the incarcerated population were employed full time in the 30 days prior to their arrest (Maruschak and Snell 2023).

Figure 5. Annual employment for people discharged from parole in 2014, by year



Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.

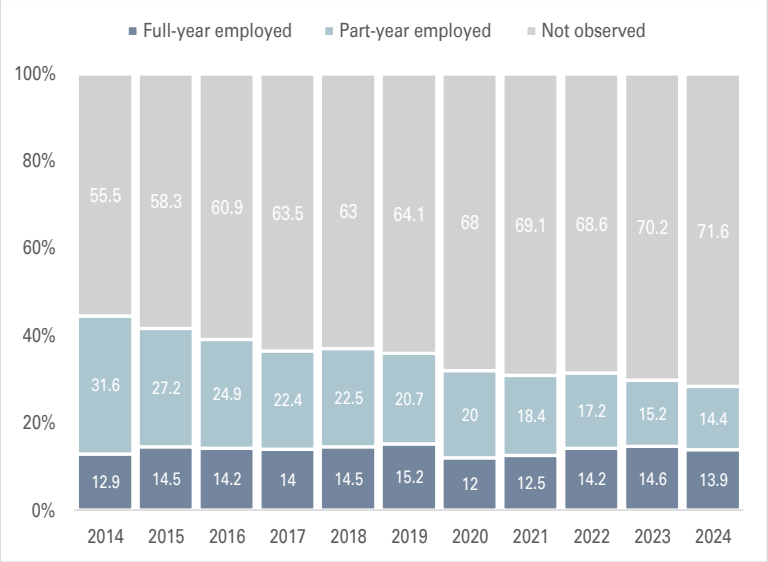
Full-year versus intermittent employment

As discussed previously, employment quality, stability, and long-term prospects are critical for reducing criminal behavior. We therefore distinguish between full-year employment (individuals employed in all four quarters of a calendar year) and part-year employment (those employed in one to three quarters only). Although 44.5 percent of individuals had some employment in 2014, only 12.9 percent worked throughout the entire year, while 31.6 percent were employed part of the year (intermittent workers). This indicates that many individuals experienced periods of unemployment during the year, reflecting weak attachment to the labor market (see Figure 6).

Full-year employment declined sharply in 2020, likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which coincided with the lowest employment levels observed during

the ten-year period. The highest share of full-year employment occurred in 2019 (15.2 percent). While part-year workers make up the majority of those employed, this group also experienced a pronounced decline over time. This pattern may reflect growing labor market discouragement, increased instability, or recidivism, which would mechanically reduce observed employment in later years. Prior research supports concerns about recidivism. A study in Michigan found that 40 percent of parolees experienced an arrest within two years of beginning employment (Labriola 2020). The relationship between employment trajectories and recidivism can be examined in greater detail in future LA FIRST reports.

Figure 6. Annual employment for people discharged from parole in 2014, by year and type of employment



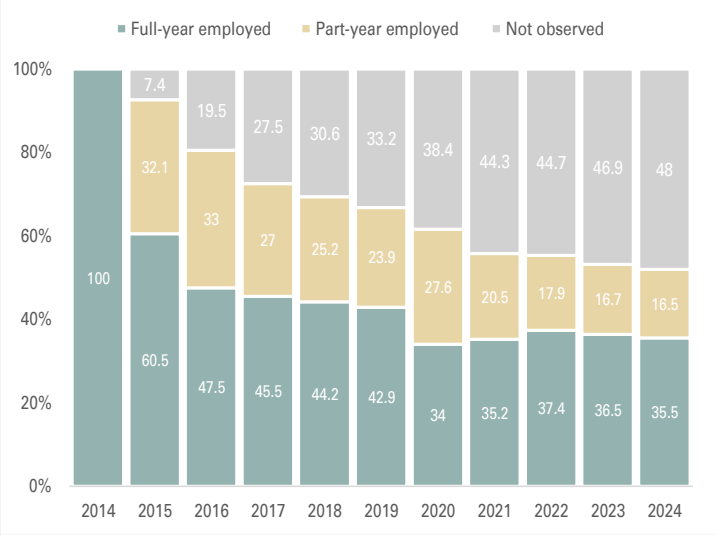
Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.

Case study: Persistence of full- and part-year employment among people discharged from parole

To gain a deeper understanding of employment stability over time, we construct two cohorts based on individuals' employment status in 2014. The first cohort includes individuals who were employed full year in 2014, while the second includes those who were employed part year in that same year. We then follow both cohorts through 2024 to examine changes in their labor market attachment over time.

Among individuals who worked a full year in 2014 (see Figure 7), only 35.5 percent continued to work full year in 2024. An additional 16.5 percent were employed part year, while 48.0 percent were no longer observed in the UI wage records. These results indicate that even individuals who initially demonstrated strong labor market attachment experienced substantial instability over the following decade.

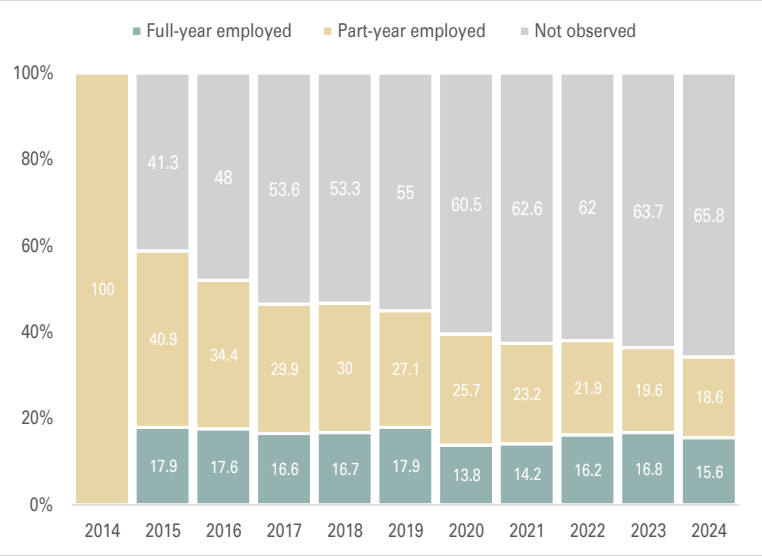
Figure 7. Persistence of full-year employment among people discharged from parole and employed full year in 2014, by year



Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.

Employment trajectories are even more unstable among those who worked part year in 2014 (see Figure 8), a group that likely faced difficulties securing stable employment at baseline. By 2024, only 15.6 percent of these individuals were working full year, and 18.6 percent remained employed part year, while 65.8 percent were no longer observed. The high rates of attrition from wage records may reflect sustained unemployment, movement into informal or out-of-state employment, disability, incarceration, and/or other barriers to stable work.

Figure 8. Persistence of part-year employment among people discharged from parole and employed part year in 2014, by year



Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.

Variations in annual employment by demographic characteristics

In this section, we present variations in annual employment by demographic characteristics (i.e., sex, race, education level at intake, and age at discharge) and across two time periods (2014–2016 and 2022–2024) to identify potential time trends. Employment outcomes are measured at the person-year level, meaning each observation represents an individual in a given calendar year and the same individual may contribute multiple observations across years. For each period (2014–2016 and 2022–2024), we report the proportion of person-year observations that are employed or not observed in UI wage records, summarized across the three years in that period. For simplicity and readability, we may refer to these values as percentages of individuals rather than percentages of observations, although the underlying measure is based on person-year observations.

Table 2. Annual employment among people discharged from parole in 2014, by demographic and criminal justice characteristics

	Full-year employment (%)		Part-year employment (%)		Not observed (%)	
	2014-2016	**2022-2024**	**2014-2016**	**2022-2024**	**2014-2016**	**2022-2024**
Sex						
Female	14.3	14.9	26.1	14.2	59.7	70.9
Male	13.8	14.2	28.1	15.8	58.1	70
Race						
Black	13.9	15.1	27.8	16.7	58.3	68.2
White	13.9	12.8	28.1	13.9	58	73.3
Other	13.6	11.6	19	10.2	67.3	78.2
Education level at intake						
None -Middle school/Other	11.3	11.4	24.7	15.1	64	73.5
GED	13.2	13.8	31.5	16.9	55.2	69.3
High-school	14.1	14.5	27.4	15.4	58.5	70
College	17.2	17.1	27.1	14.6	55.6	68.3
Age at discharge from parole						
17-24	9.9	15.2	33.3	22.8	56.8	62
25-29	13.4	15.5	32.3	19	54.3	65.6
30-39	15.1	15.4	28.9	16.2	56.1	68.5
40-49	15.2	13.7	23.4	11.7	61.4	74.6
50-55	12.0	7.0	18.1	6.1	69.8	86.8

Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.

Notes: GED refers to General Educational Development.

Variations by sex. Observed full-year employment for males and females are similar, at 14.9 percent of females and 14.2 percent of males working full-year and for years 2022-2024 (see Table 2). A slightly higher proportion of males are part-year workers in 2022-2024 (15.8 percent of males compared to 14.2 percent of females). Although women in the general population often have lower labor force participation due to caregiving responsibilities and social norms, this pattern is not observed among individuals discharged from parole. One possible explanation is the higher recidivism rates among males (Alper et al. 2018), which may limit their labor market participation.

Variations by race. When examining full-year employment by race, relatively small differences are observed during the 2014–2016 period. However, in the more recent period (2022–2024), these differences become more pronounced, with Black individuals showing the highest likelihood of full-year employment. Individuals classified as "other" races show a higher likelihood of being unobserved in the wage records. These findings should be interpreted with caution, as the "other" race category includes a relatively small number of individuals (n=49) compared to the Black and White groups.

Variations by educational attainment. Education level at intake is a self-reported measure and reflects individuals' educational attainment at the time of entry; it does not capture any education or training that may have occurred during incarceration. Employment outcomes vary consistently by education level. Individuals reporting no formal education, middle school or less, or other nontraditional education exhibit the lowest likelihood of full-year employment. In contrast, those reporting college education at intake show the highest likelihood of full-year employment, although even among this group the proportion working full time remains substantially lower than prevailing trends in the broader labor market. During the 2022–2024 period, full-year employment rates were 11.4 percent among individuals in the lowest-education group, compared with 17.1 percent among those with college education, with very similar patterns observed in 2014–2016. Individuals with a GED display the highest proportion of part-year employment, particularly in 2014–2016 (31.5 percent), suggesting greater labor force participation than lower-education groups but also greater employment instability, as reflected in intermittent employment and periods of unemployment. GED attainment is common among individuals who did not complete a traditional high school diploma and may be associated with earlier educational disruptions and less stable employment trajectories. These descriptive findings should not be interpreted as evidence of a causal relationship.

Variations by age at discharge. Differences in employment outcomes by age at discharge from parole are modest for some age groups but more pronounced for others. Individuals discharged between ages 30 and 49 exhibit the highest likelihood of full-year employment during the early post-discharge period (2014–2016), with rates ranging from 15.1 to 15.2 percent, while those discharged between ages 18 and 24 and between ages 50 and 55 show the lowest likelihood,

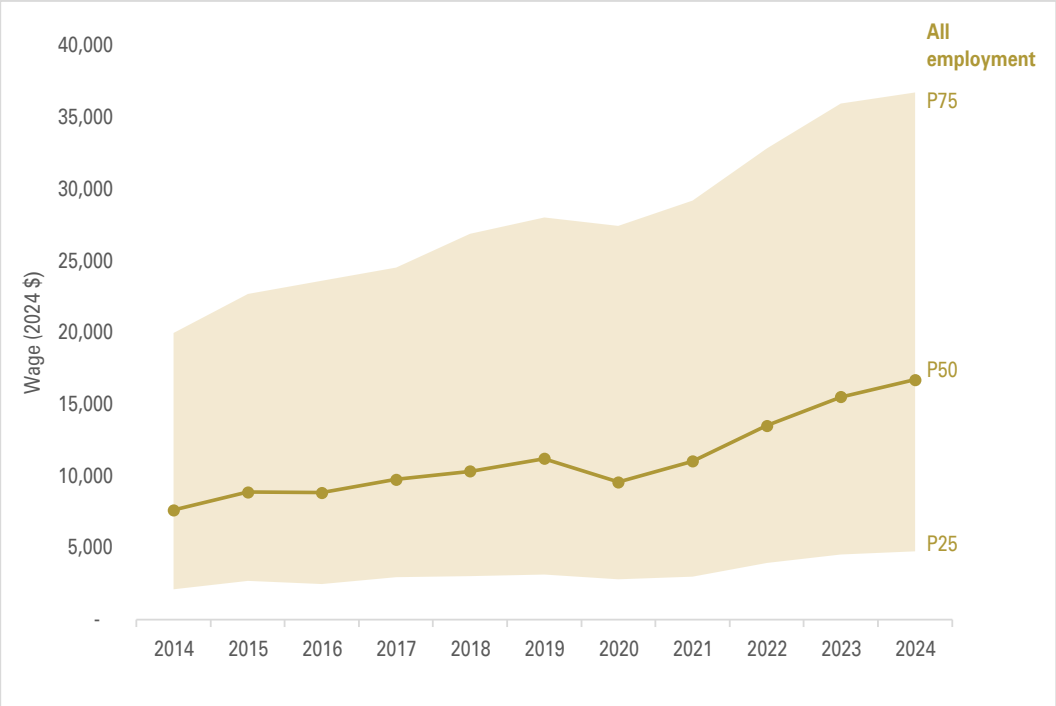
ranging from 9.9 to 12.0 percent. These patterns shift in the later period (2022–2024), with a higher proportion of individuals discharged at ages 18–24 working full year (15.2 percent) and an even lower proportion of those discharged at ages 50–55 doing so (7.0 percent). During the 2014–2016 period, the highest rates of part-year employment are observed among individuals discharged between ages 18 and 24, which may reflect continued school enrollment or greater reliance on temporary or seasonal work. In contrast, individuals discharged between ages 50 and 55 have the lowest incidence of part-year employment, suggesting that a large share of this group becomes unobserved in the formal labor market following release from corrections.

4.1.4 How much do people discharged from parole earn?

We begin this wage analysis by presenting overall trends in real annual wages for the full study population, independent of employment type. Annual wages were adjusted for inflation using the CPI and are expressed in 2024 dollars. The median annual wage exhibits a clear upward trend over the decade, from $7,640 in 2014 to $16,700 in 2024. A notable exception occurs in 2020, when median wages declined, reflecting the economic disruption associated with the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., widespread business and restaurant closures). Wages rebounded beginning in 2021 and continued to increase through 2024.

In addition to overall growth, wage differences within this group increased over the study period, as indicated by an increasing gap between the 25th and 75th percentiles. In 2014, 25 percent of individuals earned $2,110 or less; by 2024, this threshold had risen to $4,740. At the upper end of the distribution, the 75th percentile increased from $19,960 in 2014 to $36,740 in 2024, indicating that higher-earning individuals experienced disproportionately larger gains. These patterns may reflect the accumulation of work experience and wage growth opportunities in higher-paying occupations, while individuals in the lower tail of the wage distribution may be concentrated in jobs with limited advancement opportunities or experience greater employment instability. An analysis of annual wages disaggregated by employment types is presented in the next section.

Figure 9. Distribution of annual wages for people discharged from parole in 2014, by year



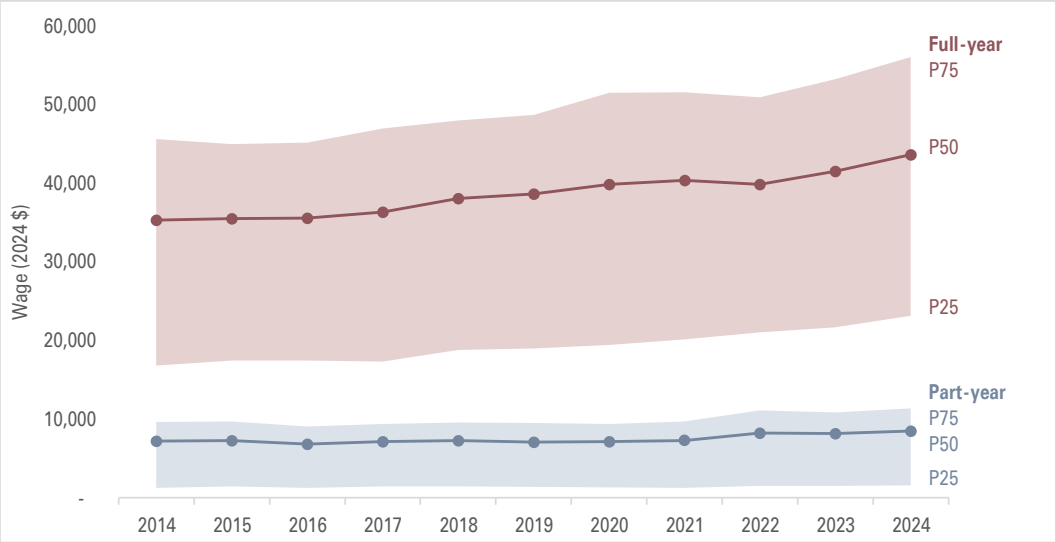
Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.

Notes: Wages are reported in constant 2024 dollars and were adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Price Index (CPI). P25, P50, and P75 refer to the 25th, 50th (median), and 75th percentiles of the distribution.

Real wages vary substantially by type of employment. Figure 10 presents the distribution of inflation-adjusted wages separately for individuals discharged from parole working full- and part- year. Among full-year workers, or those without observed unemployment spells during the year, median wages exhibit modest but steady growth over the 10-year period, increasing from $35,360 in 2014 to $43,700 in 2024. Notably, earnings for this group do not decline during the COVID-19 pandemic period. This pattern may reflect the continued employment of workers in essential sectors, such as logistics, delivery, and warehousing, as well as increased hours or overtime among workers who remained continuously employed.

Among part-year workers discharged from parole, annual wages also increase over time, but at a slower pace, rising from a median of $7,240 in 2014 to $8,490 in 2024. However, those at the bottom 25th percentile are earning between $1,270 in 2014 to $1,560 in 2024. Annual earnings below $5,000 could signal weak attachment to the labor market, reflecting either limited hours of work, employment for only part of the year, or frequent transitions between employment and unemployment. Similar patterns have been observed in other studies. For example, a study in Michigan found that individuals with high employment instability were employed in only a small share of observed quarters and experienced frequent transitions in and out of work, often with very low earnings when employed (Harding et al. 2019a).

Figure 10. Distribution of annual wages for people discharged from parole in 2014, by type of employment and year



Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.
Notes: Wages are reported in constant 2024 dollars and were adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Price Index (CPI). P25, P50, and P75 refer to the 25th, 50th (median), and 75th percentiles of the distribution.

Variation in annual wages by demographic characteristics

This section presents wage outcomes for two periods: 2014–2016 and 2022–2024. For each period, we pool all person-year observations and report the median annual real wage over the three-year period. Using the median reduces the influence of year-to-year fluctuations and provides a more robust summary of employment patterns within each period. Wage estimates are primarily interpreted for individuals working full year, as wage differences among those working part year are generally small, typically amounting to less than $2,750 a year across time.

Table 3. Annual employment among people discharged from parole in 2014, by demographic and criminal justice characteristics

	Median annual wage ($)			
	Full-year employment		Part-year employment	
	2014-2016	2022-2024	2014-2016	2022-2024
Sex				
Female	19,010	23,540	2,420	2,870
Male	29,110	36,410	4,220	5,130
Race				
Black	23,910	31,840	3,500	4,570
White	36,970	43,070	5,000	5,490
Other	39,700	32,870	6,010	3,480
Education level at intake				
None-Middle school/Other	26,180	32,550	3,240	3,740
GED	29,710	34,720	4,250	5,110
High-school	26,700	34,400	3,890	4,890
College	31,420	41,860	5,000	4,940
Age at discharge from parole				
17-24	18,910	32,970	2,630	3,950
25-29	24,640	35,020	3,400	4,250
30-39	28,870	33,650	4,410	5,570
40-49	31,670	38,970	5,020	5,050
50-55	29,620	31,040	5,380	5,110

Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.

Notes: Wages are reported in constant 2024 dollars and were adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

Variations by sex. While there are no meaningful differences between females and males discharged from parole in 2014 in the proportion working full year, there are substantial differences in annual wages. Across both periods, males earn more than females, with annual wage differences exceeding $10,000. During the 2022-2024 period, the median annual wage for females was $23,540, compared with $36,410 among males.

Variations by race. Among those discharged from parole in 2014, Black individuals exhibit the highest proportions working both full and part year; however, they also have the lowest wages in both employment categories. Racial wage disparities were more pronounced prior to the pandemic. During 2014–2016, the wage differential between median earning from White and Black individuals was $13,060, with White individuals earning more. In contrast, during the 2022–2024 period, this difference narrowed to $11,230. These wage differences may reflect sorting across industries. For example, a study of individuals released from prison in Michigan found that African Americans were less likely to be employed in construction and more likely to work in fast food establishments (Harding et al. 2019a). As shown in the following section, construction is associated with substantially higher wages in our sample, which may help explain part of the observed disparity.

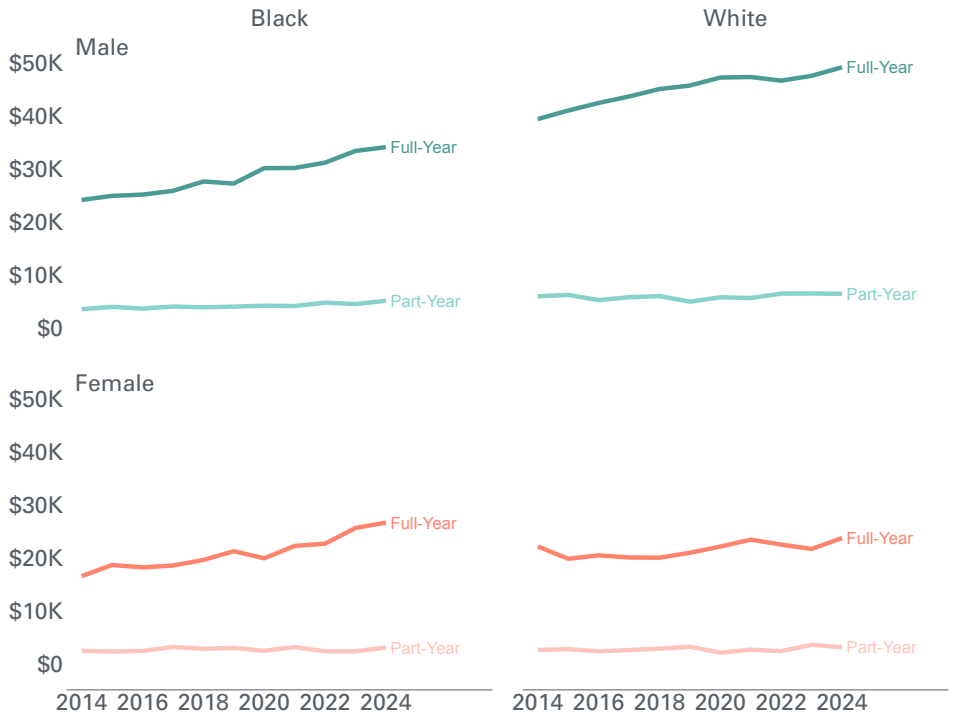
Variations by educational attainment. Wage differences by self-reported education level at intake are less pronounced than those observed by sex or race but reveal notable differences between those with more and less education. Prior to the pandemic, the wage gap between individuals with college education and those with no education or only middle school education was $5,240. This gap widened in the post-pandemic period, increasing to $9,310, indicating a growing wage premium associated with higher educational attainment, which could also be associated with more work experience before incarceration.

Variations by age at discharge. During the first three years following discharge (2014–2016), individuals who were ages 40–49 at the time of parole discharge and worked full year earned the highest median annual wage ($31,670). This group continued to have the highest median earnings during the later period (2022–2024), indicating sustained labor market attachment and accumulated work experience. Initially, the lowest median wages were observed among individuals discharged at ages 18–24, likely reflecting limited work experience and early career entry. However, by 2022–2024, the lowest median wages were observed among those discharged at ages 50–55, which may reflect a combination of some workers leaving the workforce due to retirement and other challenges facing older workers including skill obsolescence, potential health limitations, and/or age-related discrimination.

Variations by sex and race. In addition to the previously discussed comparisons of wages by sex and by race presented in Table 3, we estimate differences in median annual wages at the intersection of race and sex (see Figure 11). Among

females, racial differences in median wages are relatively small. However, among males, racial differences in median wages are substantial, with White males earning significantly more than all other groups (Black males, White females, and Black females). In 2024, the median wage for White males was $15,050 higher than that of Black males, $25,420 higher than that of White females, and $22,520 higher than that of Black females. In most years, White females have the lowest median wages among all groups.

Figure 11. Annual wages by sex and race among people discharged from parole, by year and type of employment



Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.
Notes: Wages are reported in constant 2024 dollars and were adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

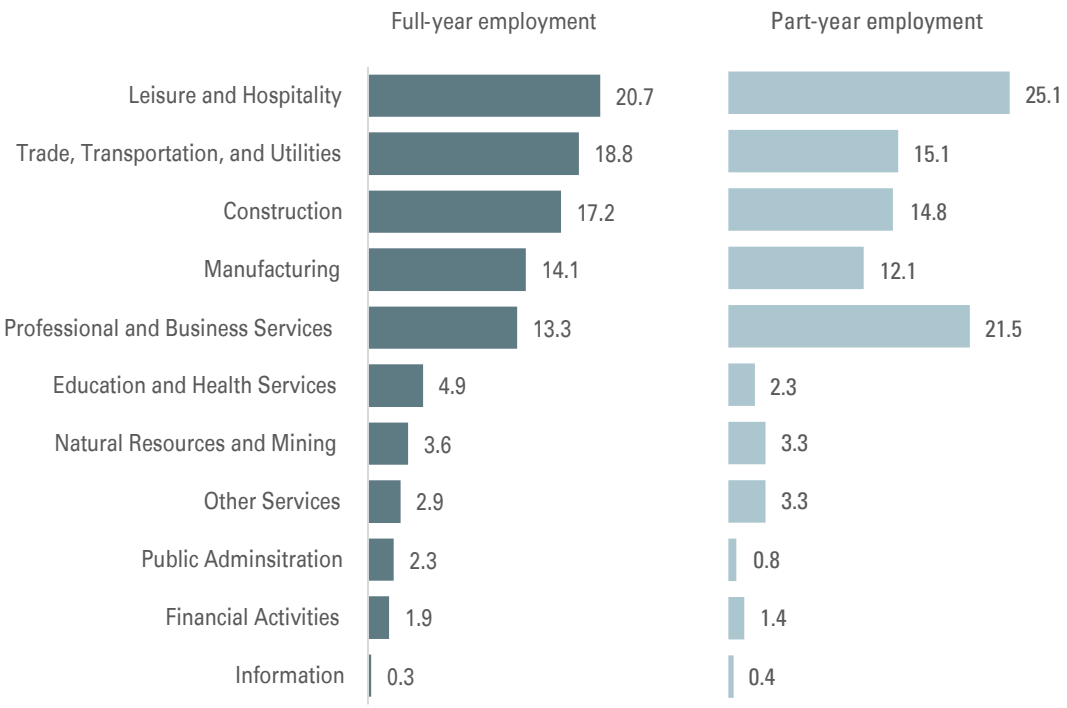
4.1.5 Where do people discharged from parole work?

Supersectors and subsectors

In this section, we examine the distribution of employment for those discharged from parole by industry. Understanding the types of businesses that hire individuals with a history of incarceration helps to illuminate the opportunities for stable employment and higher earnings available and taken up by this population. We start the analysis by presenting the distribution of employment

by supersectors or large aggregated categories that combine related industries (see Figure 12). Leisure and Hospitality represents the largest share of observed employment for both full- and part-year workers (20.7 percent among full-year and 25.1 percent among part-year workers). Professional and Business Services is the second-largest sector overall, driven primarily by part-year employment. Among full-year workers, Trade, Transportation, and Utilities is the second-largest sector (18.8 percent). Other notable sectors include Construction and Manufacturing. All remaining sectors each account for less than 5 percent of the employed population.

Figure 12. Distribution of employment by supersectors for those discharged from parole in 2014, by type of employment



Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.

Examining employment by supersector can be informative. However, it provides only limited insights since jobs within the same supersector can differ significantly in terms of stability and wage growth prospect. Therefore, we also summarize employment by the more detailed three-digit NAICS subsector classification for those subsectors that employ larger numbers of formerly incarcerated individuals. In Table 4 we present the top 15 NAICS subsectors sorted by size for all employment. Top subsectors for our population include Food Services and Drinking Places, Administrative and Support Services, Specialty Trade Contractors and Heavy, Civil Engineering Construction, and Food Manufacturing.

Table 4. Top 15 subsectors or industries employing people discharged from parole in 2014, frequencies by year

	Year											
	2014	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**	**Total**
1. Food Services and Drinking Places	1,237	1,161	1,151	1,020	1,012	981	861	813	821	761	733	10,551
2. Administrative and Support Services	1,048	878	819	753	752	702	633	643	637	536	469	7,870
3. Specialty Trade Contractors	561	510	443	412	355	346	311	287	288	262	257	4,032
4. Heavy and Civil Engineering Construction	304	294	244	236	234	223	224	179	168	215	208	2,529
5. Food Manufacturing	192	230	236	233	232	207	160	155	160	145	126	2,076
6. Construction of Buildings	175	142	184	180	166	138	128	95	108	93	84	1,493
7. Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing	129	124	117	112	121	139	105	83	93	101	107	1,231
8. Repair and Maintenance	146	121	116	111	102	104	86	86	80	77	80	1,109
9. Accommodation	74	84	97	93	103	94	74	92	100	76	79	966
10. Food and Beverage Retailers	93	88	84	97	76	76	66	79	93	101	99	952
11. Support Activities for Mining	166	124	57	59	97	87	65	73	90	76	54	948
12. Motor Vehicle and Parts Dealers	93	106	89	84	89	83	76	78	81	74	69	922
13. Merchant Wholesalers, Durable Goods	107	95	80	81	88	70	67	61	73	64	59	845
14. Gasoline Stations and Fuel Dealers	79	94	90	86	74	88	68	68	60	65	60	832
15. General Merchandise Retailers	66	82	76	64	66	72	72	73	79	78	71	799

Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.

Notes: Industry names follow the 2022 North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) three-digit industry titles.

In the United States, wage levels vary substantially across industries. For example, in 2024 and at the national level, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that the mean annual wage in the subsector Food Services and Drinking Places was $36,860, while the mean annual wage in Support Activities for Mining was $70,200, nearly double. To illustrate how wages vary across industries within our study population, we present median annual wages for the 15 most common industries in our sample. To improve sample size and stabilize industry-level estimates, we pool three years of data (2022–2024), which represent the most recent years available in our dataset. Each value in the table therefore represents the median of all inflation-adjusted annual wages recorded for individuals in those industries during that period (see Table 5).

Industries are ranked based on how prevalent they are in the study population (same order as in Table 5). The most common industry for people discharged from parole, Food Services and Drinking Places, has a median annual wage of $19,680 for individuals working full year and $2,760 for those working part year, making it the lowest-paying industry among the top 15. It is followed by Food and Beverage Retailers ($20,560 for full-year workers) and Gasoline Stations and Fuel Dealers ($21,500 for full-year workers). In contrast, the highest-paying industries among the top 15—Support Activities for Mining (oil and gas), Heavy and Civil Engineering Construction, and Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing—each report median annual wages above $50,000. However, despite their higher wage levels, these industries employ relatively few individuals in our sample. For example, Support Activities for Mining accounts for only 948 person-year observations, while Food Services and Drinking Places accounts for 10,551 (see Table 4 for 2014-2024 counts).

Table 5. Annual wages and employment counts for the most common 15 subsectors, by type of employment

	2022-2024 Median annual wage ($)		2022-2024 People employed (count)	
	Full-year employment	**Part-year employment**	**Full-year employment**	**Part-year employment**
1. Food Services and Drinking Places	19,680	2,760	909	1,406
2. Administrative and Support Services	26,110	3,490	534	1,108
3. Specialty Trade Contractors	46,430	8,400	446	361
4. Heavy and Civil Engineering Construction	55,150	9,320	322	269
5. Food Manufacturing	33,530	5,190	180	251
6. Construction of Buildings	46,380	9,370	151	134
7. Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing	51,920	9,720	172	129
8. Repair and Maintenance	32,830	5,360	101	136
9. Accommodation	22,170	3,730	104	151
10. Food and Beverage Retailers	20,560	3,460	111	182
11. Support Activities for Mining	58,250	13,770	116	104
12. Motor Vehicle and Parts Dealers	34,260	7,040	126	98
13. Merchant Wholesalers, Durable Goods	39,020	9,440	103	93
14. Gasoline Stations and Fuel Dealers	21,500	3,990	72	113
15. General Merchandise Retailers	26,540	3,540	117	111

Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.

Notes: Wages are reported in constant 2024 dollars and were adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

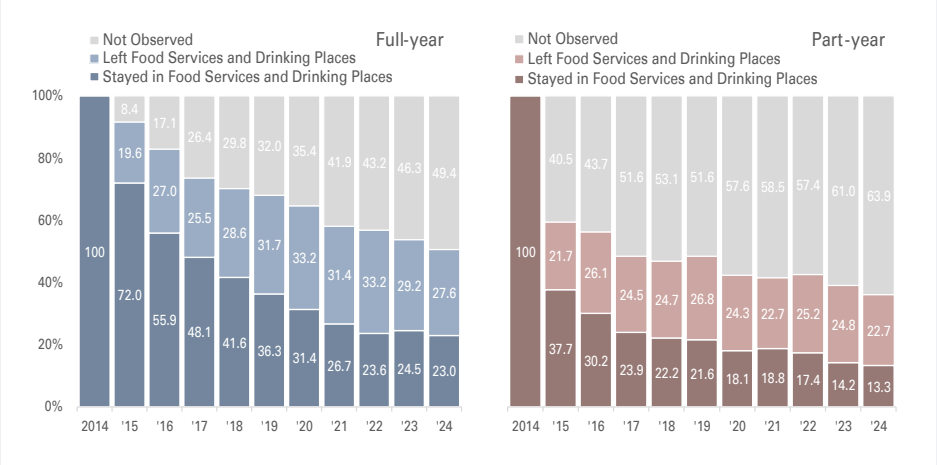
Industry names follow the 2022 North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) three digit industry titles.

Case study: Persistence in Food Services and Drinking Places

Across all workers in the economy, the Food Services and Drinking Places industry is typically characterized by low wages but comparatively high employment levels at both the state and national levels. According to 2025 second-quarter data from the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW), Food Services and Drinking Places (NAICS 722) has a June employment location quotient of 1.11 in Louisiana, indicating that the industry is slightly more concentrated in the state than in the nation overall. This reflects a combination of tourism as a major industry within the state and demand from residents who support these establishments.

This industry consistently ranked among the top five industries in our analysis of employment for formerly incarcerated individuals. For these reasons, we selected it as a case study to examine employment persistence—specifically, whether individuals who began working in the food services industry remained in that industry over a 10-year period or transitioned into other industries. We further assessed whether their outcomes differed by type of employment. Finally, we examined wage differences at the end of the 10-year period (2024) between individuals who remained in the industry and those who exited.

Figure 13. Persistence of employment in the Food Services and Drinking Places Industry for those discharged from parole in 2014



Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.

To examine these patterns, we follow a cohort of individuals who were employed in the food industry in 2014 over a ten-year period and compare outcomes by employment type (full-year versus part-year) (see Figure 13). Our findings show that for those who started as full-year workers, 27.6 percent were working in another industry 10 years later, whereas 22.7 percent moved into another industry among part-year workers by 2024. Also, 49.4 percent became unobserved among full-year workers, while the proportion of those who became unobserved among part-year workers reached 63.9 percent by 2024, indicating that those who worked part-year in the industry are much less likely to be found working at all in Louisiana over time. Overall, we observe that by 2024, while 23.0 percent of full-year workers stayed in the food industry, only 13.3 percent of part-year workers stayed – approximately a 10 percent difference across employment type.

Furthermore, among those who worked in the food industry (for both full and part-year), we observe that those who stayed in the industry through 2024 (15.8 percent) earned a median annual wage of $11,460, compared to $17,350 for those who transitioned to other industries – a notable difference of $5,890. These findings suggest that while the food industry may provide an entry point into employment for many individuals after discharge from parole, it offers more limited wage growth over time relative to other industries. However, this wage gap may also reflect differences in unobserved characteristics, such as education, skill level, or age, which are not accounted for in this analysis; therefore, these results should be interpreted with caution.

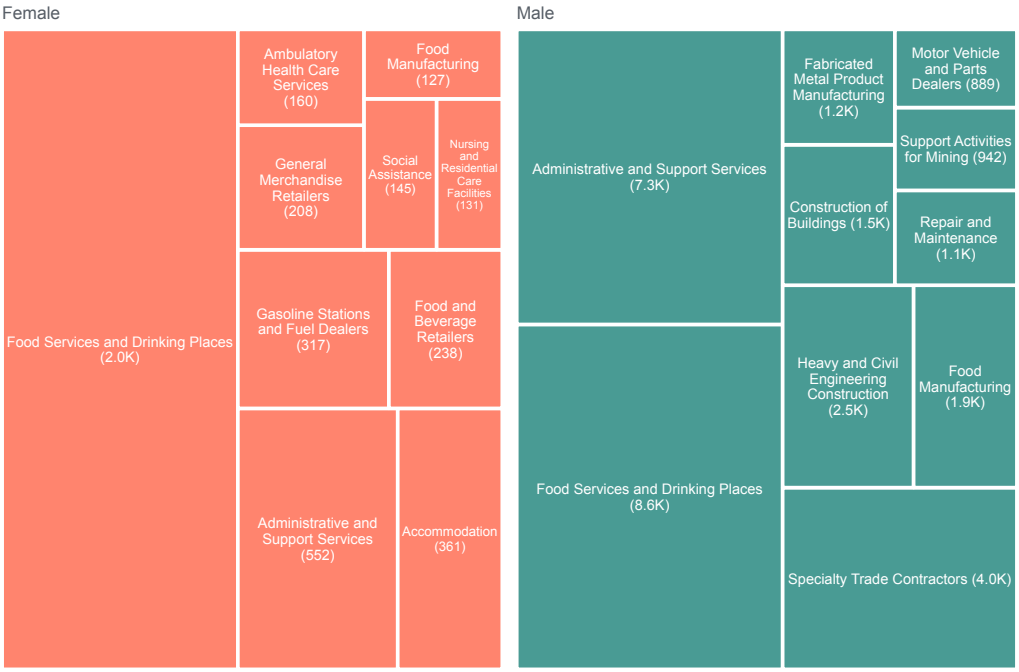
Variations in industry affiliation

We now examine variation in the industries in which individuals discharged from parole are employed, focusing on differences by sex and year groups. As expected, employment patterns vary substantially between males and females (see Figure 14). For both groups, the most common industries include Food Services and Drinking Places and Administrative and Support Services. However, differences emerge beyond these shared sectors. Among males, relatively high concentrations of workers appear in Specialty Trade Contractors and Heavy and Civil Engineering Construction. In contrast, females are more likely to be employed in industries such as Accommodation and Gasoline Stations and Fuel Dealers.

These differences in industry concentration are consequential because they align with variation in wage levels across sectors. For example, Heavy and Civil Engineering Construction, which ranks 4th in total employment among males, has a substantially higher median annual wage than Gasoline Stations and Fuel Dealers, which ranks 4th in total employment among females. The gap in median

annual earnings between these two industries amounts to approximately $33,650 (see Table 5). Thus, observed gender differences in wages within our sample are heavily influenced by differential sorting into industries with distinct pay structures. Overall, while men and women share employment in several large service-sector industries, men are more represented in higher-paying construction and extraction-related industries, whereas women are more concentrated in lower-paying service and care-related sectors. These patterns may reflect earlier differences in educational pathways and occupational entry, as gendered sorting into fields of study and initial job placements can have long-term implications for wage trajectories and career mobility (Habans et al. 2025).

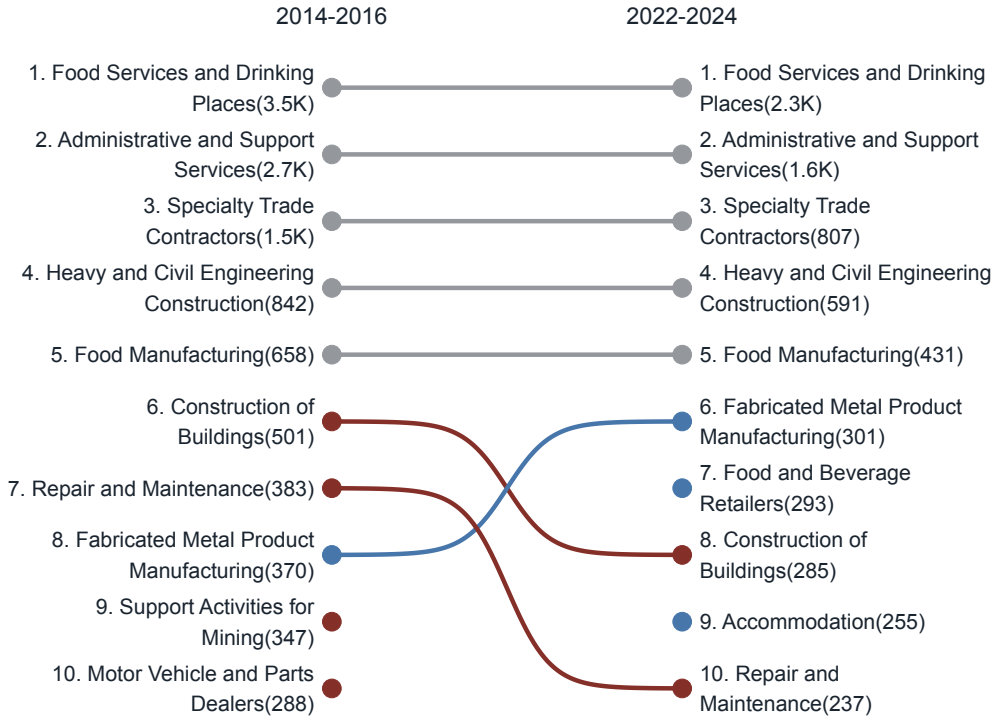
Figure 14. Top 10 industries for females and males discharged from parole in 2014



Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.
Notes: Industry names follow the 2022 North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) three digit industry titles.

Differences in employer industry over time allow us to examine whether individuals transition across sectors as their post-discharge trajectories unfold. Ideally, we would expect to see movement from lower-paying industries into higher-paying ones as individuals gain experience and stability in the labor market. At the same time, changes in industry concentration may also reflect broader economic conditions, as shifts in demand, local labor markets, and opportunity structures shape which industries are more accessible or attractive at a given time. In our findings, however, we observe limited evidence of substantial movement across industries (see Figure 15). The five most common industries during the first three years after discharge (2014-2016) remain the most common industries in 2022–2024. Where changes do appear, they are relatively small and may not represent meaningful or statistically significant shifts.

Figure 15. Top 10 industries for total employment, by year group



Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.
Notes: Industry names follow the 2022 North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) three digit industry titles.

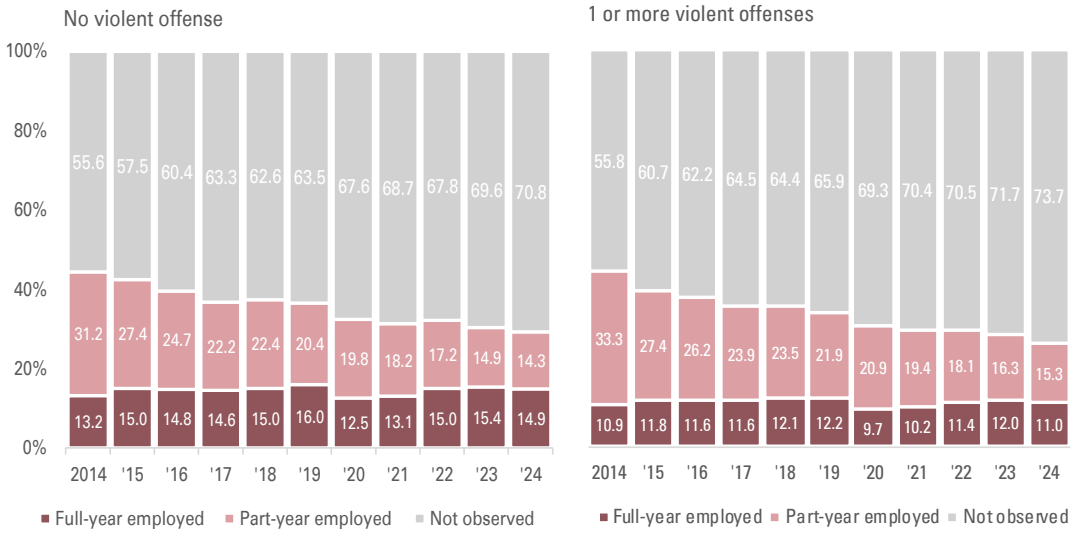
4.1.6 Labor market differences by offense type and intensity and timing of their justice involvement

Offense type

The type of offense committed (e.g., violent, drug, or property) may influence employment outcomes following incarceration, whether through differences in individual characteristics and work histories or through potential labor market discrimination. In this report, we focus on violent and drug offenses, as these categories have received particular attention from policymakers (see Louisiana Executive Order JML 24-124 establishing the Drug Control and Violent Crime Policy Board).

Figure 16 shows differences in annual employment between individuals with and without a violent offense. Individuals with one or more violent offense(s) are less likely to work full-year than those without a violent offense. In 2024, for example, 11.0 percent of individuals with a violent offense worked full year, compared with 14.9 percent of those without a violent offense.

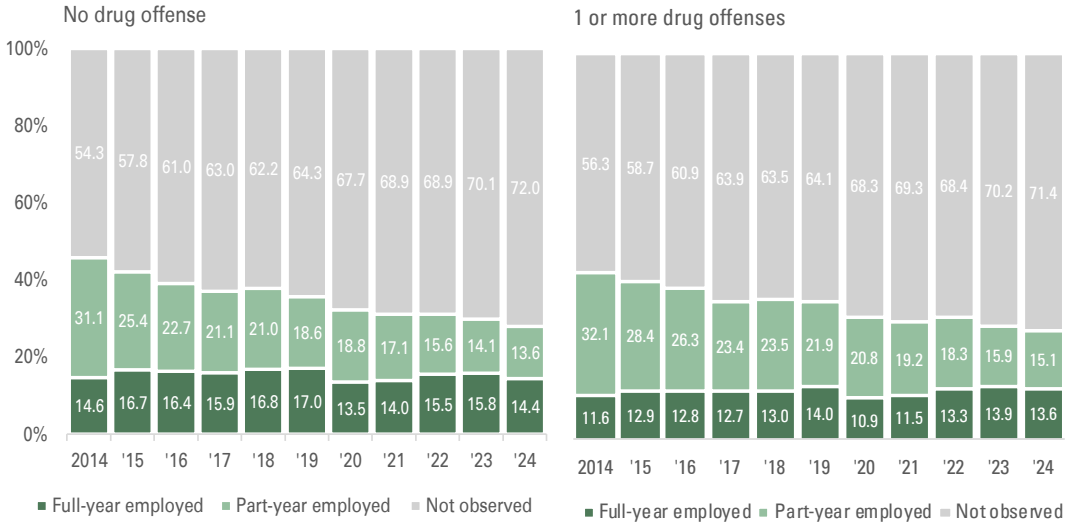
Figure 16. Annual employment for those discharged from parole and with and without a violent offense, by type of employment and year



Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.

Similarly, Figure 17 presents annual employment for individuals with and without a drug offense. Individuals with a drug offense are also less likely to work full year than those without a drug offense. Full-year employment in 2024 was 13.6 percent among those with a drug offense compared with 14.4 percent among those without a drug offense. These patterns suggest that individuals whose primary offenses fall outside these categories, such as property or financial (white-collar) offenses, may have relatively higher employment rates. This pattern is consistent with the possibility that property offenses are more closely tied to situational or economic factors and may therefore be less strongly associated with long-term labor market barriers.

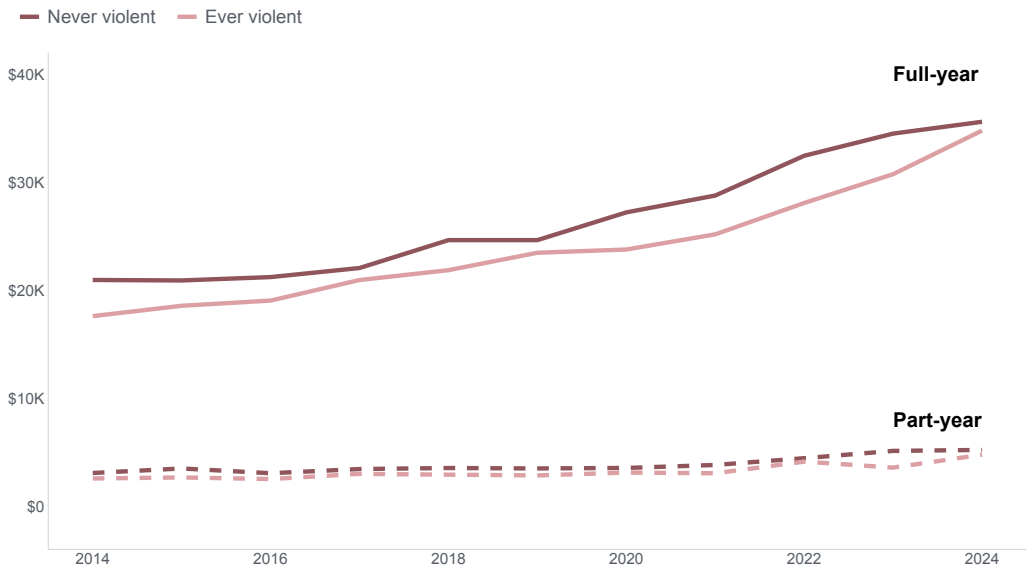
Figure 17. Annual employment for people discharged from parole and with and without a drug offense, by type of employment and year



Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.

The median wages of individuals working full year and with no violent record follow a similar trend to those with at least one violent record, although individuals without a violent record earn slightly more than their counterparts (see Figure 18). Among part-year workers, wages show little growth and remain very low throughout the period, and differences between the nonviolent and violent groups are small in absolute dollar terms.

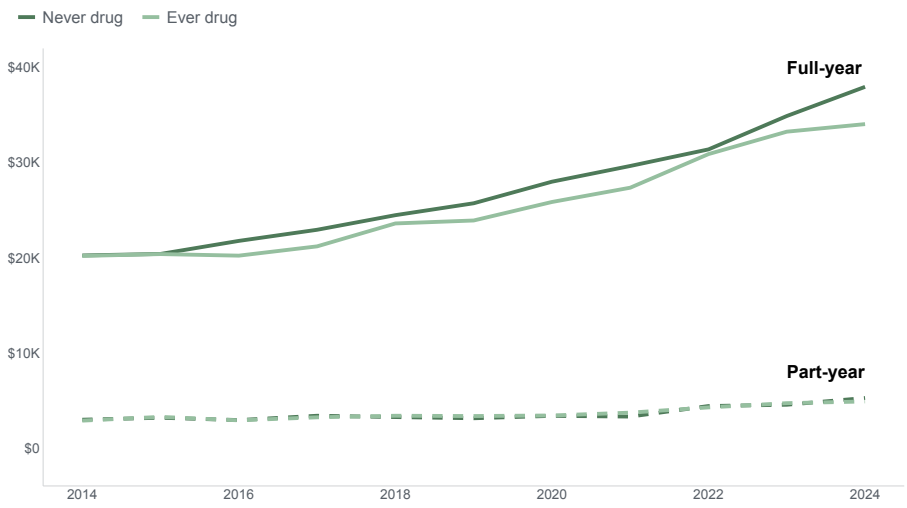
Figure 18. Median annual wages for people discharged from parole and with and without a violent offense, by type of employment and year



Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.

Similar to the pattern observed for individuals with and without violent offenses, modest differences in wages are observed between full-year workers with a drug offense and those without a drug offense. These differences widen slightly in the years immediately following the pandemic but narrow again by 2022. Finally, individuals who remain in part-year employment earn very low wages, and earnings are nearly identical for those with and without a drug offense, with little wage growth over time.

Figure 19. Median annual wages for people discharged from parole and with and without a drug offense, by type of employment and year



Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.

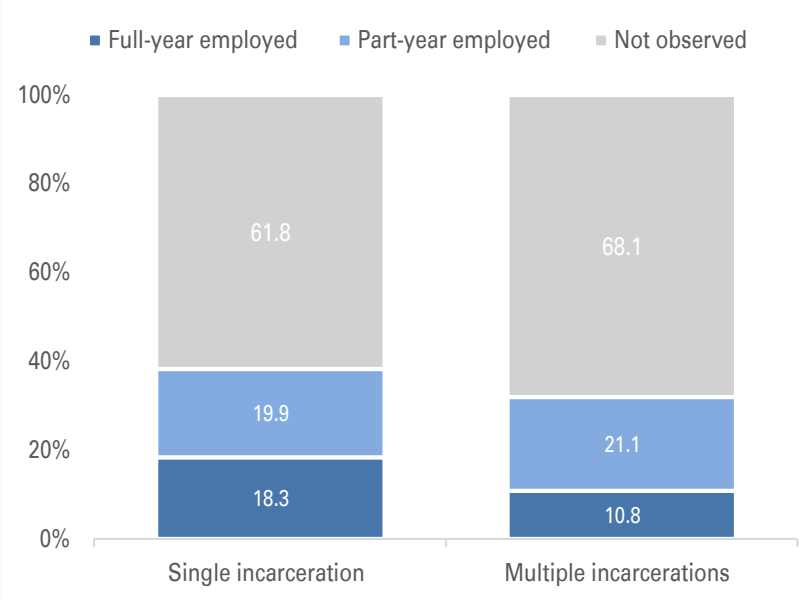
Intensity and timing of justice involvement

This section examines how employment outcomes among people discharged from parole vary by the intensity and timing of their justice involvement. Specifically, we analyze two characteristics: the number of incarcerations and the age at first incarceration. For each measure, we present annual employment rates and median annual wages.

Number of incarcerations. Employment outcomes are examined based on whether an individual experienced a single incarceration event or multiple incarceration events. Unlike earlier sections that present results by year, the analysis here uses data aggregated across all observed years to provide an overall picture of employment patterns. Employment measures are calculated at the person-year level since individuals may contribute information for multiple years. For simplicity, we refer to percentages of individuals rather than percentages of observations to make the report easy to read.

Among those with a single incarceration, full-year employment was observed 18.3 percent of the time (see Figure 20). In contrast, full-year employment was observed only 10.8 percent of the time among those with multiple incarcerations. Part-year employment shows a somewhat different pattern, with similar proportions for those with a single (19.9 percent) compared to multiple incarcerations (21.1 percent). These findings are consistent with the idea that individuals who cycle in and out of the justice system face greater challenges in securing stable employment. Some may return to incarceration, while others may face restrictions related to supervision or the stigma associated with repeated justice involvement. At the same time, the results also show that individuals with a single incarceration, even if they do not return to the system, may still face significant challenges securing stable employment.

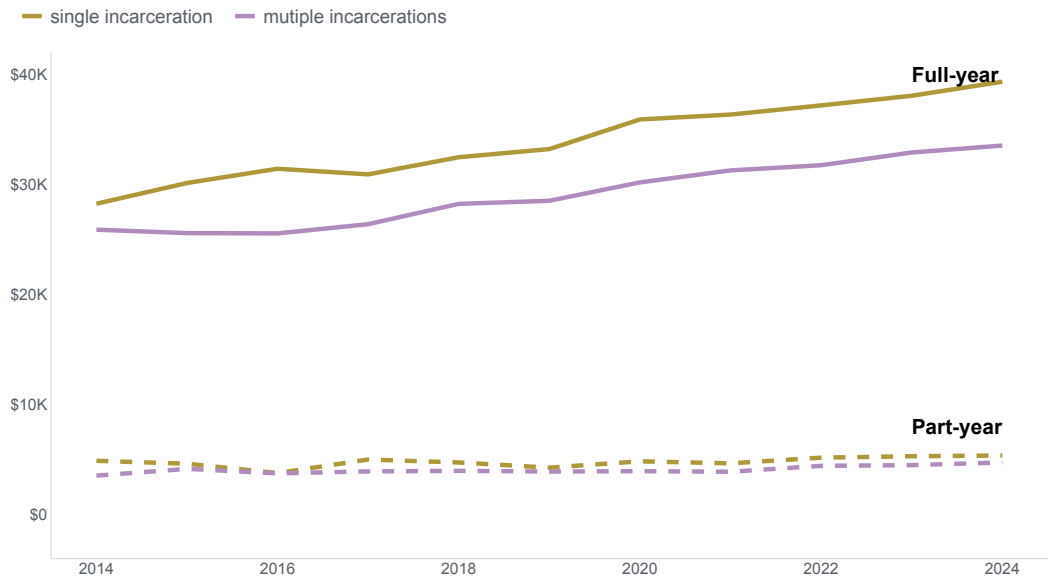
Figure 20. Annual employment for people discharged from parole, by number of incarcerations



Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.

In addition to differences in employment rates, we also examine differences in wages among those who are employed. We begin by focusing on individuals with full-year employment. The median annual wage across all records from 2014 to 2024 was $33,450 for individuals with a single incarceration and $29,110 for those with multiple incarceration events. This pattern suggests that those with more episodes of incarceration face additional challenges in the labor market. Differences in wages immediately after discharge may reflect limited work experience resulting from time spent incarcerated, as well as possible employer reluctance to hire individuals with multiple incarceration events. Over time, individuals with a single incarceration event experience faster wage growth, leading to larger differences between this group and those with multiple incarcerations by 2024. A similar pattern is observed for part-year employment, although earnings remain very low throughout the ten-year period and show little change over time.

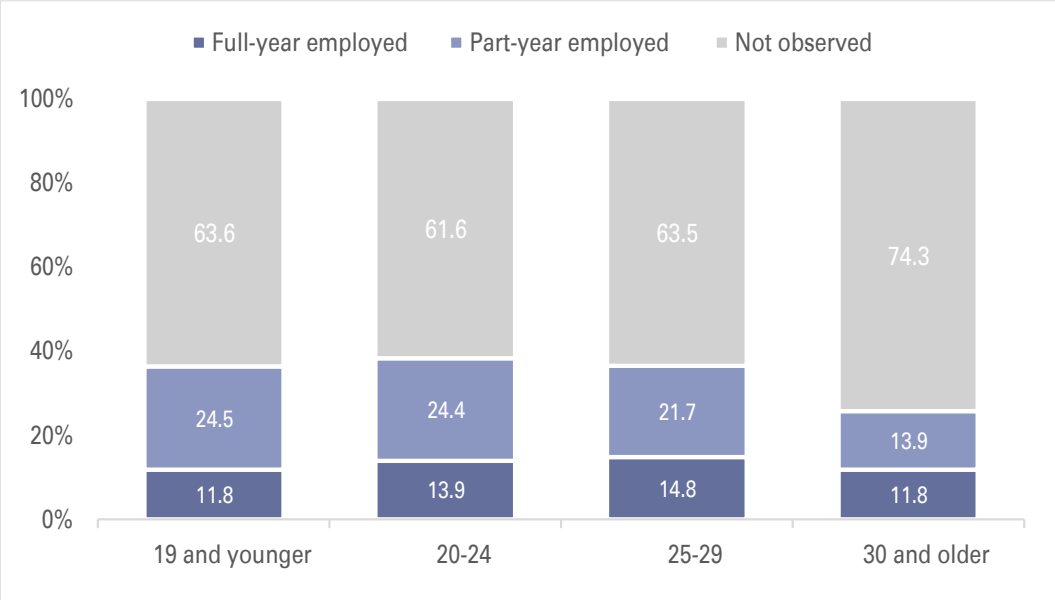
Figure 21. Median annual wages, by number of incarcerations, type of employment and year



Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.
Notes: Wages are reported in constant 2024 dollars and were adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Price Index **(CPI)**.

Age at first incarceration. We also examine how employment and wages vary by age at first incarceration. To do so, individuals are grouped into four categories: 19 and younger, 20–24, 25–29, and 30 and older. A nonlinear relationship between employment rates and age at first incarceration emerges. Among individuals first incarcerated at age 19 or younger, full-year employment is less common than in most other groups, which is consistent with evidence that early exposure to the justice system may disrupt schooling and weaken later labor-market attachment. Full-year employment rates are higher among those first incarcerated between ages 20–24 and 25–29. However, individuals first incarcerated at age 30 or older have a rate of full-year employment similar to that of the youngest group, as well as a notably lower rate of part-year employment than any other group. These patterns suggest that employment outcomes are influenced by multiple overlapping factors that cannot be fully disentangled using descriptive analysis alone.

Figure 22. Annual employment, by age at first incarceration and type of employment

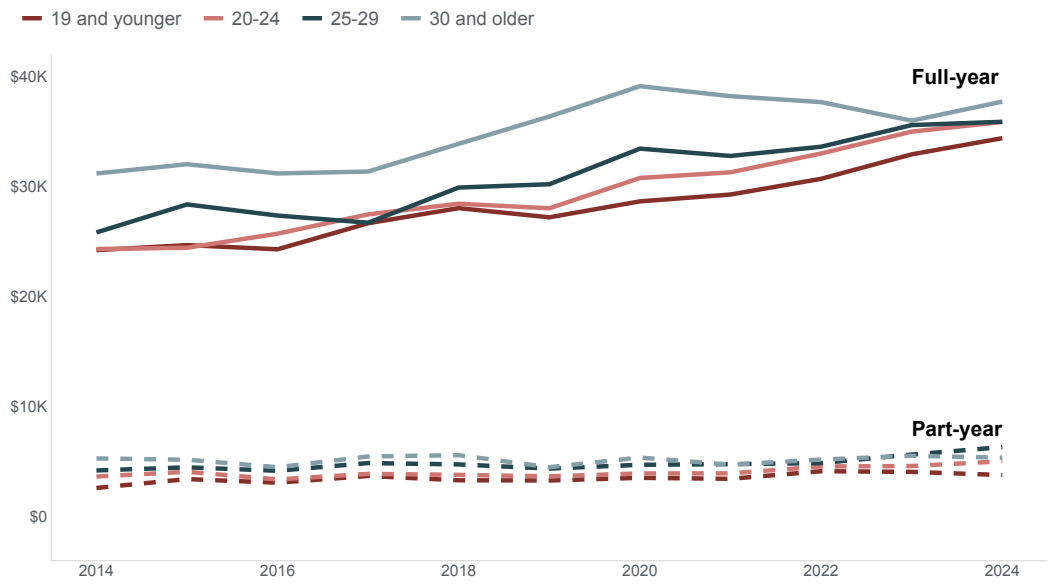


Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.

To complement the employment analysis, we examine the trend in annual wages from 2014 to 2024 for these age-at-first-incarceration groups. Among individuals with full-year employment, median wages over the 10-year interval increase with age at first incarceration. Overall, median wages were $28,650, $29,670, $30,980, and $34,280 for ages 19 and younger, 20-24, 25-29, and 30 and older, respectively. Older groups have notably higher wages upon reentry, which may reflect differences in education and training acquired before the first incarceration. However, after 10 years, the younger groups largely closed that gap suggesting that the types of jobs individuals move into upon reentry may be limited in terms of upward mobility or advancement.

We find a similar pattern of higher median wages for those with older age at first incarceration for part-year workers, though all earnings are quite low among part-year workers and differences are small. As shown in Figure 23, wages for part-year employment range from approximately $2,500 to $5,600 annually. To provide a benchmark, these earnings correspond to roughly 345 to 773 hours of work per year, equivalent to about 6 to 14 hours per week, assuming an hourly wage of $7.25. This low level of earnings may reflect short-term or intermittent work, multiple spells of unemployment, or generally limited labor market attachment rather than sustained part-time employment throughout the year.

Figure 23. Annual median wages by age at first incarceration and type of employment



Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.

4.1.7 Summary of findings for adults discharged from parole

This analysis identified a cohort of 13,222 individuals discharged from parole or good time parole in 2014 and linked their records to UI wage data from 2014 to 2024.

1. Across different years, between 55.5 and 71.6 percent of those discharged from parole were not found in the UI wage records, indicating they were not formally employed in Louisiana during the observed year.
2. Among those with at least one UI wage record in a given year, the majority were intermittent (part-year) workers. For example, in 2014, 31.6 percent were intermittent workers, while 12.9 percent were employed full year. Ten years later, in 2024, 14.4 percent were part-year workers and 13.9 percent were full-year workers.
3. In 2024, only 35.5 percent of those who worked full year in 2014 continued working full year, while 48.0 percent became unobserved. Similarly, only 15.6 percent of those who worked part year in 2014 transitioned to full-year employment, while 65.8 percent became unobserved.
4. Variation by sex and race shows that females and Black individuals experienced the highest rates of full-year employment.
5. Differences by education level at intake were observed. Individuals who self-reported the lowest levels of education (none, kindergarten through middle school, or other) had full-year employment rates between 11.3 and 11.4 percent.

Among those with a college education, the percentage increased to between 17.1 and 17.2 percent.

6. Age at discharge from parole also influenced employment outcomes. The highest likelihood of not appearing in formal employment was among individuals discharged at ages 50 to 55.

7. Median annual wages from 2014 to 2024 increased modestly for the entire cohort. However, real wages declined in 2020, likely reflecting the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

8. When examining annual wages by type of employment, substantial differences are observed. In 2014, the median annual wage for individuals working full year was $35,360, compared with $7,240 for part-year workers.

9. Differences in annual wages are also observed by sex and race, with males and White individuals earning more than females and Black individuals. When examining the intersection of sex and race, the median annual wage of White males is $15,050 higher than that of Black males, $22,520 higher than that of Black females, and $25,420 higher than that of White females.

10. Differences in annual wages by education level at intake are also observed. The gap between the lowest level of education (none, less than middle school, or other) and the highest level (college) ranges from $5,240 to $9,310.

11. Variations in annual wages by age at parole discharge show that, during the 2022 to 2024 period, the lowest wages were observed among those discharged at ages 50 to 55, while the highest wages were observed among those discharged at ages 40 to 49.

12. We examine the distribution of employment by supersector and find that the majority of individuals discharged from parole are employed in Leisure and Hospitality.

13. Looking at more detailed three-digit NAICS subsectors, we identify the top 15 industries or subsectors for this population. The three most common are Food Services and Drinking Places, Administrative and Support Services, and Specialty Trade Contractors.

14. Each of these industries is associated with different levels of job stability, median wages, and career prospects. We present the median annual wages for the top 15 subsectors for the years 2022 to 2024. The highest median annual wage is observed in Support Activities for Mining ($58,250), while the lowest is found in one of the most common subsectors, Food Services and Drinking Places ($19,680).

15. We also include a case study of the Food Services and Drinking Places subsector. The analysis suggests that this industry may provide an entry point into employment for many individuals but offers limited wage growth over a ten-year period.

16. Differences in the industries where females and males work are also observed, with potential economic implications. For example, among males working full year, Heavy and Civil Engineering Construction appears among the top ten industries and is also a relatively high-earning sector. Among females, however, lower-paying industries such as Accommodation and Gasoline Stations appear among the top ten.

17. Differences in industries over time show limited evidence of substantial movement across sectors. The top five industries remain largely the same in the 2014 to 2016 and 2022 to 2024 periods, with only a few changes observed.

18. Differences in full- and part-year employment are observed between individuals with violent and nonviolent offenses, as well as between those with drug and non-drug offenses. This suggests that individuals with violent or drug offenses may experience worse employment outcomes compared with those convicted of other offenses, such as property or white-collar crimes.

19. Employment outcomes differ by number of incarcerations. Individuals with a single incarceration show higher rates of both full- and part-year employment than those with multiple incarcerations.

20. Employment outcomes by age at first incarceration show a mixed pattern, with the lowest employment rates among individuals first incarcerated at ages 19 and younger and those first incarcerated at ages 30 or older.

21. Significant wage differences are observed by number of incarcerations. Individuals with a single incarceration earn more than those with multiple incarcerations, although wage trends over time are similar across groups.

4.2 Employment outcomes of people with a history of juvenile justice involvement in Louisiana

In this section, we present the employment outcomes of individuals with a history of juvenile justice involvement. For clarity, when we refer to juvenile justice involvement, we specifically mean youth who were under the custody or supervision of the Office of Juvenile Justice (OJJ), excluding other forms of juvenile justice contact such as being arrested and released without further action or participating in diversion programs. We examine their outcomes between ages 18 and 30, focusing on employment status, annual wages, and primary industry of employment. The analysis is presented by age, age groups, and selected demographic and justice-involvement characteristics.

4.2.1 Population and matching outcomes

Our population consists of individuals released from OJJ's care between 2009 and 2023 (n=35,506). After removing 117 with data that could not be linked, we were left with 35,389 individuals with juvenile justice involvement. To ensure relevance of the workforce analysis to early career experiences that are more likely to be influenced directly by OJJ involvement, we focused on the employment outcomes of those aged 18 to 30 between 2014 and 2024, meaning they were born between 1984 and 2006. This age restriction reduces our final population for analysis to 34,228. Table 6 presents the distribution of our final population by sex, race and year of last release.

Table 6. Distribution of population for analysis (people with a history of OJJ involvement), by sex, race, and year of last release

	Year of last release			
	2010 or less	**2011-2012**	**2013 or more**	**Total**
Sex				
Female	1,564	1,390	5,058	8,012
Male	5,061	4,304	16,851	26,216
Race				
Black	4,110	3,497	13,467	21,074
White	2,361	2,045	7,532	11,938
Others	154	152	910	1,216

Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.

Our population of individuals with a history of OJJ involvement was then matched to UI wage records. 28,265 individuals (82.6 percent) could be linked or matched to any UI wage record between 2014 and 2024, while 5,963 could not be linked to any UI wage record in Louisiana. The proportion of individuals matched to UI wage records by sex and race can be found in Table 7. A higher percentage of females matched to a wage record when compared to males (87.0 percent compared to 81.2 percent), and a higher percentage of White individuals matched when compared to Black and other race individuals (85.1, 81.3 and 80.3 percent, respectively).

Table 7. Linkage to Louisiana UI wage records among people with a history of OJJ involvement by sex and race

	Matched to any UI wage record (%)
Sex	
Female	87.0
Male	81.2
Race	
Black	81.3
White	85.1
Others	80.3

Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.

Finally, because individuals in the cohort are not observed for the same number of years, the panel is unbalanced: some individuals contribute only one year of observations, while others are observed for multiple years (from ages 18 to 30). To assess whether this affects our findings, we replicated the analysis using a restricted and balanced panel in which all individuals are observed over the same age range, from 20 to 27. The results from this balanced sample are substantively similar to those presented in the report. The results from this robustness check are not shown here but are available from the authors upon request.

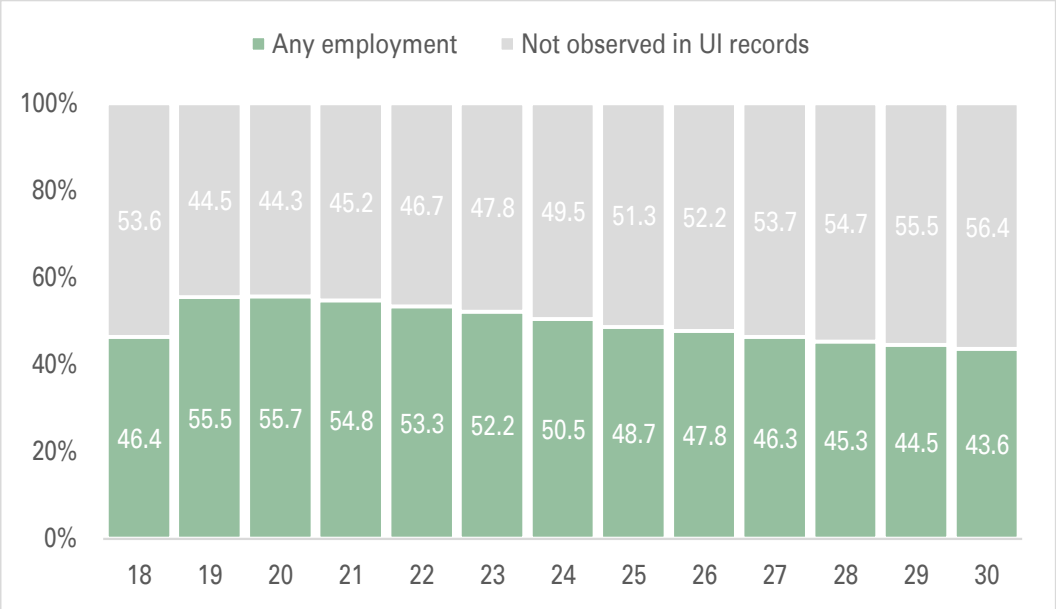
4.2.2 How does employment attachment change over time for people with a history of juvenile justice involvement?

Employment during adulthood

We begin the analysis by examining the proportion of those aged 18 to 30 who were employed for at least one quarter of the year as they age. Across different ages, between 43.6 and 55.7 percent of the population are employed in a given year (see Figure 24). Conversely, 44.3 to 56.4 percent are not observed in the Louisiana UI wage records, suggesting they are out of the labor force, may have

relocated out of state, are engaged in informal employment, or hold jobs that do not generate a W-2 form in Louisiana. For comparison, analysis of the American Community Survey (ACS) indicates that among similarly aged adults in Louisiana, approximately 74.4 percent of males and 73.9 percent of females were employed during the 2015–2024 period. Although this report does not include information on educational attainment after justice involvement, these patterns of low formal employment are consistent with ACS data showing higher labor market detachment among young adults with lower levels of education (see Appendix). Future reports could explore post–justice involvement educational trajectories for this population.

Figure 24. Annual employment among people with a history of OJJ involvement, by age



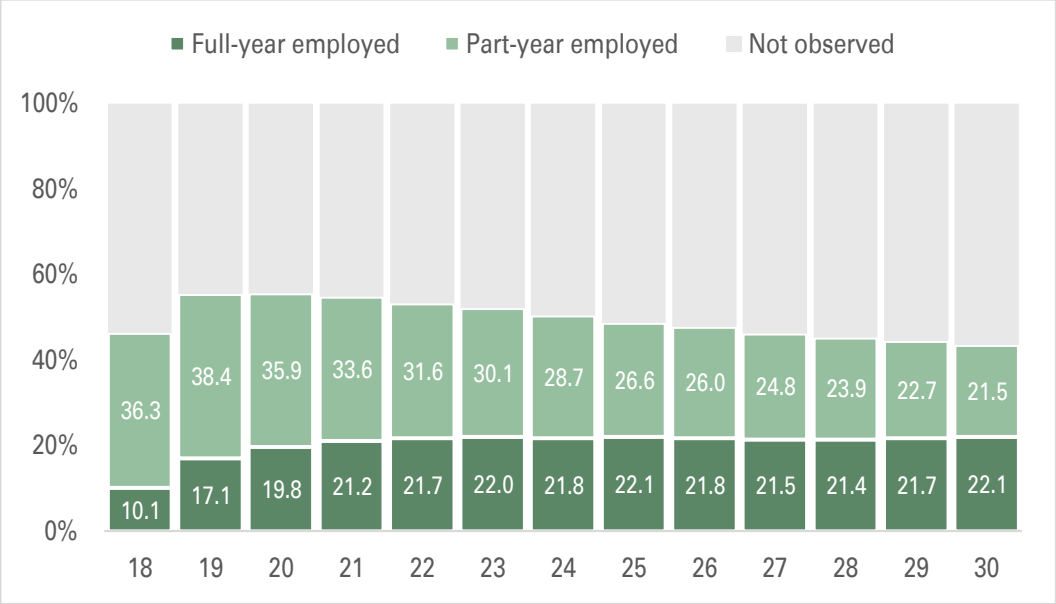
Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.

Full-year versus intermittent employment

Even though 43.6 to 55.7 percent of the population is observed working at least one quarter at different ages, this measure masks substantial variation in the stability and quality of the employment. We therefore distinguish between full-year employment and part-year or intermittent work. As discussed in the literature, part-year or intermittent employment may reflect periods of unemployment, irregular attachment to the labor market, or low-quality jobs with unstable hours, which often have other poor working conditions. Figure 25 shows that the majority of those employed at any point during the year are intermittent workers. For example, at age 19, 38.4 percent of the population are intermittent workers while only 17.1 percent are employed year-round. This pattern is expected to be more common in early adulthood, as many individuals are still pursuing their studies. However, by age 30, we observe a decline in the proportion of intermittent workers (from

36.3 percent at age 18 to 21.5 percent at age 30) and a rise in the proportion of individuals who are no longer observed in UI wage records. This suggests that some individuals may become discouraged and exit the labor market if they are unable to secure consistent, year-round employment.

Figure 25. Annual employment among people with a history of OJJ involvement, by type of employment and age

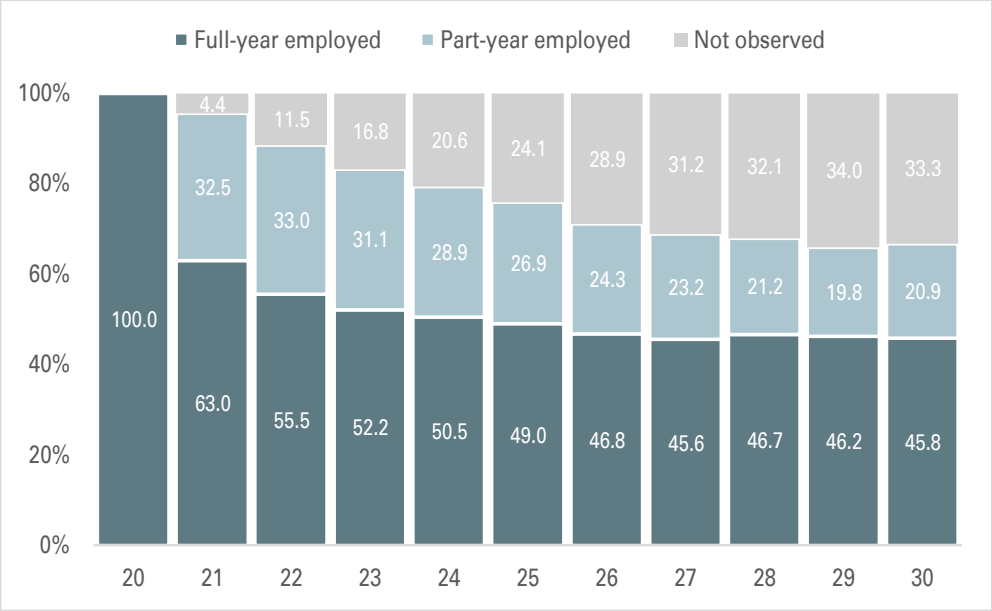


Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.

Persistence of full-year employment

To better understand the stability of full-year employment over time, we identify a cohort of individuals working a full year at age 20 and track them until they are 30. By tracking their wage records over a span of 10 years, we see how many continued working a full year as they aged. By age 30, 45.8 percent were still engaged in full-year employment, while 33.3 percent were no longer working in covered employment in Louisiana, highlighting significant transitions into and out of steady work. Below the surface, our findings reveal a dynamic picture with widespread employment transitions (see Figure 26).

Figure 26. Persistence of full-year employment from ages 20-30 among people with a history of OJJ involvement



Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.

Variations in annual employment by demographic and juvenile justice characteristics

In this section, we present variations in annual employment by demographic and juvenile justice characteristics (see Table 8). To simplify the analysis, we present these measures by age group, as opposed to individual ages. When we aggregate data into age groups, one individual might appear multiple times. Therefore, each observation represents one person-year. For the sake of clarity and consistency in this report, we will refer to individuals, as opposed to person-years when discussing age groups, ensuring our findings are both accurate and accessible.

Table 8. Annual employment among people with a history of OJJ involvement, by age groups and demographic and juvenile justice characteristics

	Full-year employment (%)		Part-year employment (%)		Not observed (%)	
	20-24	**25-29**	**20-24**	**25-29**	**20-24**	**25-29**
Sex						
Female	28.0	28.4	35.6	27.6	36.4	44.1
Male	19.2	19.7	31.0	24.4	49.8	55.9
Race						
Black	18.9	19.3	32.6	26.5	48.5	54.2
White	25.5	26.0	31.3	22.9	43.2	51.1
Others	22.3	22.3	30.3	20.3	47.4	57.3
Type most severe delinquent offense						
Violent	18.4	18.6	30.4	24.0	51.2	57.4
Property non-violent	19.3	20.6	32.1	25.2	48.6	54.2
Drugs	21.4	21.4	30.8	23.6	47.8	55.0
Status	22.2	23.9	34.3	26.8	43.5	49.2
Others	24.2	23.9	32.9	26.6	42.9	49.5
Number of episodes with OJJ						
1	22.1	22.6	32.5	25.4	45.5	52.0
2	18.4	18.6	30.6	24.0	51.0	57.4
3 or more	11.9	13.4	27.6	22.3	60.5	64.3
Type of OJJ involvement						
Never custody/ Supervision only	24.8	25.3	32.5	24.9	42.7	49.8
Ever custody	12.0	13.8	31.0	25.5	57.0	60.7

Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.

V**ariations by sex.** Males, compared with females, were more likely to be unobserved in the Louisiana UI wage records across both age groups. Between the ages of 20 and 24, 28.0 percent of females worked full year, compared with 19.2 percent of males. Similar differences persisted at ages 25 to 29, where 28.4 percent of females worked full year compared with 19.7 percent of males. This pattern of lower observed formal employment among males than females differs from patterns in the broader Louisiana population, where males are generally more likely to be employed than females. One possible explanation is that justice involvement among males and females may differ in important ways. As discussed in the literature review, prior research suggests that male offending is more often associated with structural factors, whereas female offending may be more closely linked to situational circumstances. These differences in pathways into justice involvement may also shape subsequent employment outcomes.

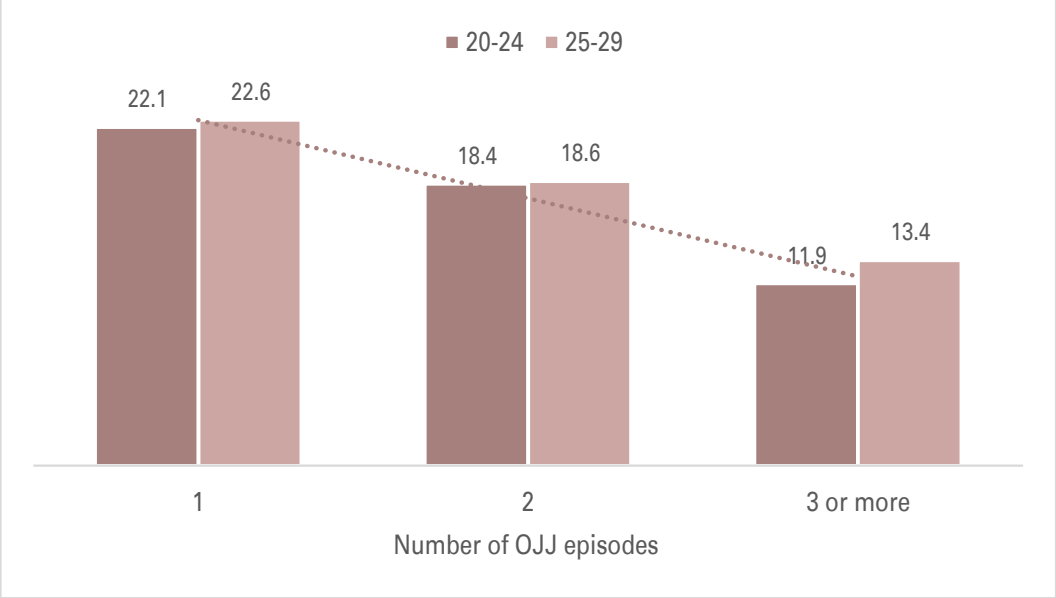
Variations by race. White individuals were more likely to work the full year at different ages. For example, at ages 20-24, 25.5 percent of White individuals worked the full year, compared with 18.9 percent of Black individuals and 22.3 percent of individuals of other races. At ages 25-29, a similar pattern remained: 26.0 percent of White individuals worked the full year, compared with 19.3 percent of Black individuals and 22.3 percent of individuals of other races. This pattern of lower employment among Black than White young adults is consistent with the Blanco Center analysis of the ACS data showing differences in employment among 25-29-year-olds with less than a high school diploma in Louisiana. For those with less than a high school diploma in the ACS, results showed 44 percent of White males compared to 21 percent of Black males employed full-time.

Variations by type of delinquent offense. While 92.3 percent of the juveniles in our population had been adjudicated for a delinquent offense, there is a subset of 2,637 individuals who, despite not having such an adjudication, were placed under the supervision or custody of OJJ by a judge, this group is not included in this particular analysis. Among those with an adjudicated delinquent offense, we examined differences based on the most severe type of offense ever adjudicated. Our results highlight that those with violent offenses had the lowest rates of full-year employment across both the 20-24 (18.4 percent) and 25-29 (18.6 percent) age ranges. Since juvenile records are sealed, this could suggest that it's not the official label of a violent offense driving these employment challenges, but more likely the life circumstances or experiences associated with such offenses.

Variations by type of OJJ involvement (supervision versus custody). This analysis focuses solely on characteristics of juveniles' interactions with OJJ, excluding the interactions with police, juvenile courts, or other agencies. We compare those ever in OJJ custody versus supervision only and we find that full-year employment is higher among those who experienced supervision only than among those who were ever in custody (24.8 percent compared to 12.0 percent among ages 20–24). Importantly, these differences should not be interpreted causally, as both observed and unobserved factors associated with custody involvement (e.g., more serious delinquent offenses) may also drive differences in employment outcomes.

Variations by number of OJJ episodes. We examine whether the number of encounters with the juvenile justice system is associated with employment outcomes. Full-year employment by number of OJJ episodes is presented in Table 8 and Figure 27. Among individuals ages 20-24, 22.1 percent of observations with one OJJ episode have full-year UI wage records, compared with 11.9 percent among those with three episodes or more. Among individuals ages 25-29, these differences are 22.6 percent compared to 13.4.

Figure 27. Full-year employment among people with a history of OJJ involvement, by number of episodes with OJJ and age groups



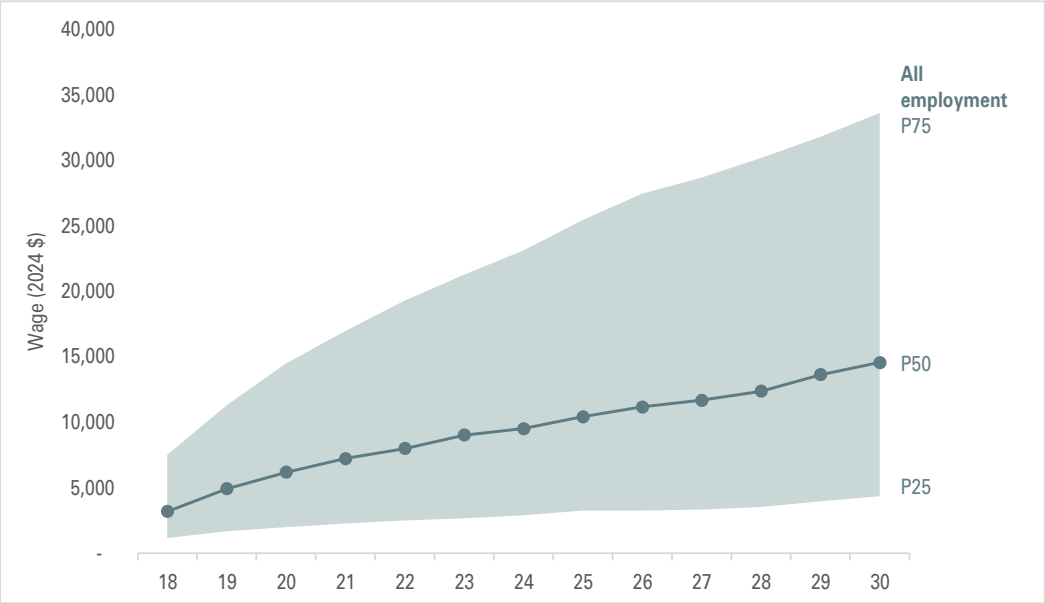
Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.

4.2.3 How much do people with a history of juvenile justice involvement earn?

Annual wages during adulthood

In this section we present the 25th, 50th and 75th percentiles of the real annual wage (in 2024 dollars using CPI) by age, for those with any employment (see Figure 28) and separately for those working four quarters (full-year) and those working 1-3 quarters only (part-year) (see Figure 29). For the entire population, including both full-year and part-year workers, the median annual wage increased from $3,190 at age 18 to $14,560 at age 30.

Figure 28. Distribution of annual wages among people with a history of OJJ involvement, for all employment and by age

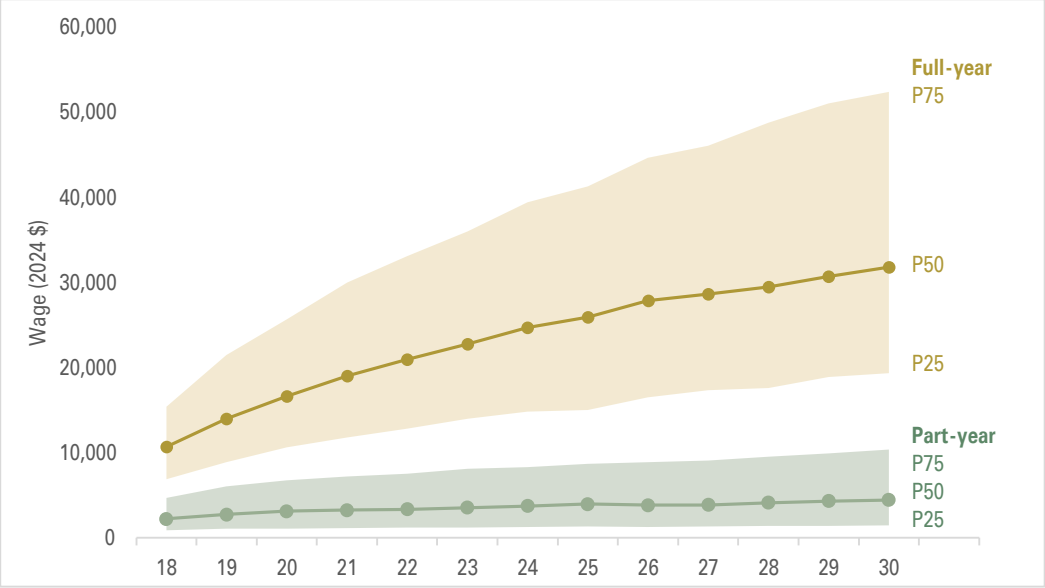


Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.
Notes: Wages are reported in constant 2024 dollars and were adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Price Index (CPI). P25, P50, and P75 refer to the 25th, 50th (median), and 75th percentiles of the distribution.

For full-year workers, wages rise steadily with age across the entire distribution, with median (p50) annual wages increasing from approximately $10,670 at age 18 to $31,770 by age 30. At the same time, the gap between the 25th and 75th percentiles widens, indicating increasing dispersion in earnings over time. In contrast, part-year workers, those experiencing unemployment spells or significant employment gaps within the year, earn substantially less across all ages, and their wage growth is modest, with the median reaching $4,430 by age 30. These lower earnings could be reflecting not only fewer hours worked but also reduced access to stable, continuous employment. This pattern is consistent with a human capital framework whereby workers earn more over time through the accumulation of experience as they develop more advanced skills or expanded responsibilities. Workers with less stable employment do not see long term growth in wages in part because they don't accumulate high value skills or job specific experience.

The median wage in Louisiana for full-year workers across all ages and occupations in 2024 stands at $43,770 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2026) (see Appendix), notably higher than the wages observed in our analysis for individuals with juvenile justice involvement. This difference may be partly explained by typical earning trajectories, as wages tend to peak between ages 35 and 54. In contrast, our analysis focuses only on earnings during early adulthood, between ages 18 and 30. However, additional Blanco Center analysis of ACS data shows that among individuals aged 18 to 30 who worked at least 40 weeks in a year, the median annual wage is $30,675. This level is similar to what individuals in our sample earn at the upper end of this age range, but higher than the wages observed at younger ages.

Figure 29. Distribution of annual wages among people with a history of OJJ involvement, by age and type of employment



Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.
Notes: Wages are reported in constant 2024 dollars and were adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Price Index (CPI). P25, P50, and P75 refer to the 25th, 50th (median), and 75th percentiles of the distribution.

Variations in annual real wages by demographic and juvenile justice characteristics

In this section, we present variations in median annual real wages by type of employment and demographic and juvenile justice characteristics (see Table 9). We distinguish between two age groups 20-24 and 25-29, to better capture wage growth over time. In general, differences in wages are most pronounced among those with full-year employment for whom the passage of time is more likely to correspond to the accumulation of skills and experience. In contrast, those with part-year employment consistently earn significantly less (less than $5,000 a year), and this remains true across most groups.

Table 9. Annual wages among people with a history of OJJ involvement, by demographic and juvenile justice characteristics

	Median annual wage (2024 USD)			
	Full-year employment		Part-year employment	
	20-24	25-29	20-24	25-29
Sex				
Female	15,960	20,790	2,940	3,290
Male	23,410	32,590	3,520	4,290
Race				
Black	16,960	22,420	2,910	3,560
White	26,930	38,330	4,430	5,100
Others	22,690	31,300	3,880	4,620
Type most severe delinquent offense				
Violent	20,610	28,100	3,010	3,550
Property non-violent	20,870	29,730	3,260	4,090
Drugs	22,620	30,810	3,780	4,260
Status	18,290	23,580	3,230	3,580
Others	20,250	27,950	3,600	4,260
Number of episodes with OJJ				
1	20,990	29,020	3,500	4,180
2	17,460	23,490	2,780	3,350
3 or more	16,120	22,270	2,560	3,210
Type of OJJ involvement				
Never custody/ Supervision only	21,140	29,430	3,720	4,500
Ever custody	16,670	21,960	2,440	3,060

Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.

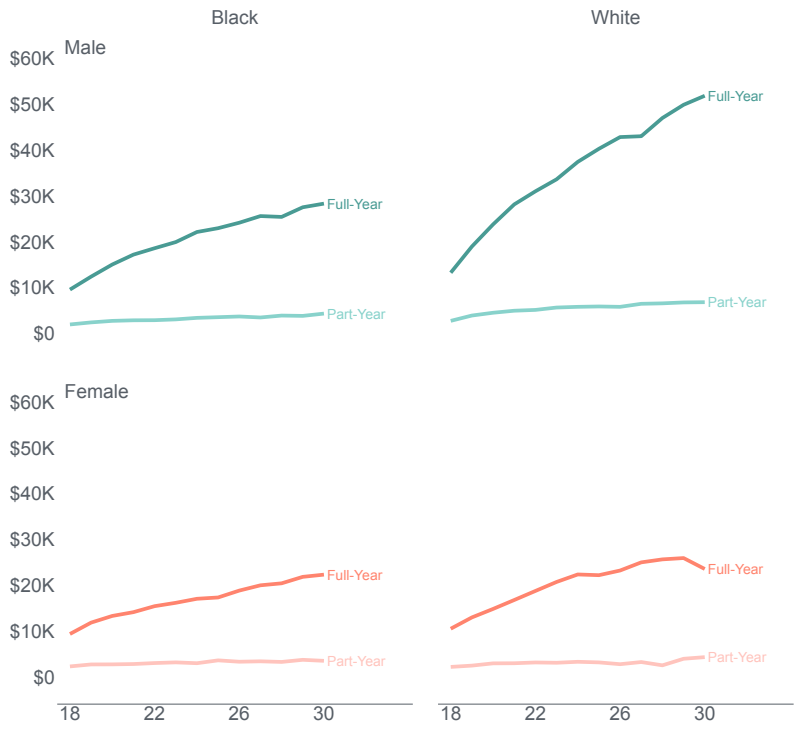
Notes: Wages are reported in constant 2024 dollars and were adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

Variations by sex. At both age ranges, males' wages are consistently higher than females'. At ages 20-24, males make approximately $7,450 more than females. The differences increase with age and for the 25-29 age group the median wage difference between females and males is approximately $11,800. This pattern is consistent with broader economy-wide trends. For example, Blanco Center analysis of ACS data that show that males in these age groups consistently earn more than females.

Variations by race. White individuals working all four quarters make more than Black or other races working the same amount of quarters and at both age periods. At ages 20-24, the majority of White individuals earn around $26,930, higher than what Black ($16,960) and other races ($22,690) earn. The differences become more pronounced at ages 25 to 29, as shown in Table 9.

Variations by sex and race. In addition to the information presented in Table 9, we explore if the intersection between race and sex by age indicates specific patterns of disparities. Given the small number of people of other races, we exclude the category from this particular analysis. As seen in Figure 30, OJJ-involved White and Black females working full year earn similar wages (at age 30, Black females earn $22,280 compared to $23,520 for White females). In contrast, Black males earn significantly less than their White counterparts– $23,550 less for full-year employment at age 30.

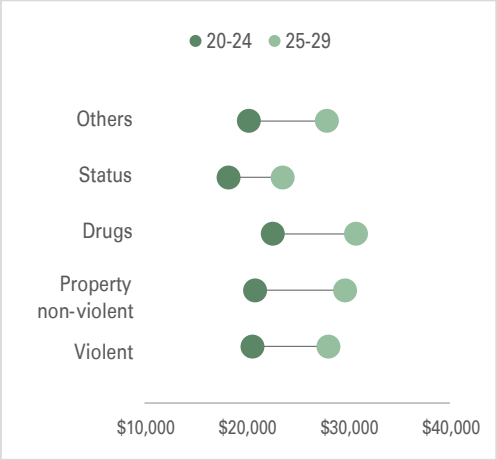
Figure 30. Median annual wages among people with a history of OJJ involvement, by sex, race, and age



Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.
Notes: Wages are reported in constant 2024 dollars and were adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Price Index (CPI). P25, P50, and P75 refer to the 25th, 50th (median), and 75th percentiles of the distribution.

Variations by type of delinquent offense. Those with a status offense as the most severe adjudication were found to have the lowest median annual wage when in full-year employment, earning median wages of $18,290 (20–24-year-olds) and $23,580 (25–29-year-olds) (see Figure 31). A status offense is an act that is considered illegal only because the individual committing it is a minor, not because the act itself is criminal (e.g. truancy, underage drinking, governability). Offhand, it may seem counterintuitive that the group of delinquents with the most modest category of adjudication have the worst wage outcomes, but those adjudicated for status offenses tend to be disproportionately female (Rovner 2025), while those detained for all delinquent acts are disproportionately male (85 percent). Aligning with our earlier findings, women earn, on average, less than men. Interestingly, those with the highest median annual wages are those with a drug delinquent offense. One possible explanation is that drug offending may be more closely tied to peer dynamics and adolescent-limited behavior rather than to deeper structural disadvantages. It is also possible that youth adjudicated for drug offenses come from relatively more advantaged backgrounds.

Figure 31. Annual wages by type of most severe delinquent offense and age groups



Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.
Notes: Wages are reported in constant 2024 dollars and were adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

Variations by type of OJJ involvement (supervision versus custody). When analyzing the median real wages by type of involvement (see Table 9), we observe that those under supervision of OJJ have a higher median wage than those who spent time in OJJ custody. This difference is larger among full-year workers: at ages 25 to 29, the median wage is $29,430 for those under supervision only compared with $21,960 for those who were ever in custody.

Variations by number of OJJ episodes. Differences by number of OJJ episodes are also observed, at ages 20-24 years, the median real wage of those employed four quarters and with only one episode with OJJ is $20,990, while for those with three or more episodes is $16,120.

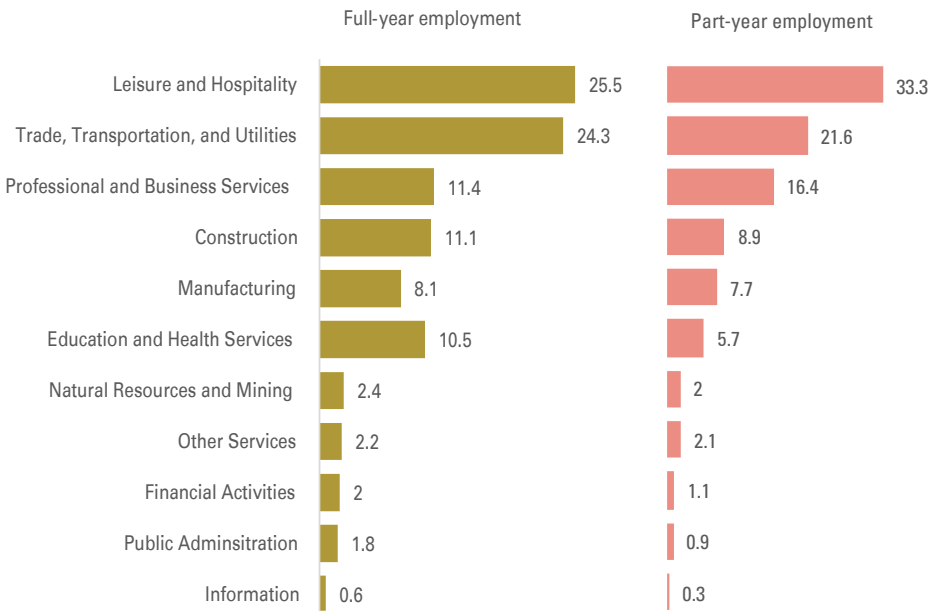
4.2.4 Where do people with a history of juvenile justice-involvement work?

Supersectors and subsectors

Understanding where individuals with prior juvenile justice involvement work is important to assessing their economic outcomes and identifying opportunities for this population who often face disruptions to education and other challenges as a youth. Industries can significantly differ in expected wage trajectories, job stability, and opportunities for advancement. For example, some sectors, such as education and health services, tend to be associated with more stable employment relationships and stronger long-run earnings growth, while others are characterized by lower wages, higher turnover, and greater earnings volatility.

Figure 32 summarizes the distribution of full- and part-year annual employment across eleven supersectors, which group industries based on the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS). Leisure and Hospitality accounts for the largest share of observed employment for individuals with a history of OJJ involvement for both full- and part-year workers. While this sector has low barriers to entry, it often offers limited opportunities for advancement and wage growth. Proportionally, this sector is more common among those with OJJ involvement working part-year. Trade, Transportation, and Utilities is the second highest supersector employing this population, for both full- and part-year employment. This sector includes a wide range of employment including skilled transportation utility workers, but also a very large number of lower-skill and lower-pay retail workers.

Figure 32. Distribution of employment among people 18-30 with a history of OJJ involvement, by supersectors and type of employment



Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.

While examining employment by supersectors can be informative, it provides only limited insight since jobs within the same supersector can differ significantly in terms of stability and wage growth prospect. Therefore, we also analyze employment by the more detailed three-digit NAICS industry or subsector. Table 10 reports the number of individuals employed, by age, in the 15 most common industries for our study population. At age 18, Food Services and Drinking Places is the most prevalent industry employing OJJ-involved people (employing 5,252 individuals), followed by Administrative and Support Services.

We find that Construction of Buildings and Support Activities for Mining are among the smallest industries for employment within the top 15 for OJJ-involved youth. The latter are especially small at young ages and peak around ages 22 to 23. These age profiles are consistent with Food Services serving as a primary point of entry into covered employment for young workers. Support Activities for Mining (e.g., support activities for oil and gas operations) on the other hand, require greater work experience and job-specific training.

Table 10. Top 15 industries or subsectors employing people with a history of OJJ involvement, frequencies by age

Industry (2022 NAICS title)	Age													
	18	**19**	**20**	**21**	**22**	**23**	**24**	**25**	**26**	**27**	**28**	**29**	**30**	**Total**
1. Food Services and Drinking Places	5,252	4,730	4,442	4,047	3,645	3,189	2,811	2,336	1,934	1,609	1,298	1,002	755	37,050
2. Administrative and Support Services	671	1,308	1,578	1,712	1,735	1,672	1,534	1,342	1,204	1,067	850	699	544	15,916
3. General Merchandise Retailers	724	1,363	1,337	1,138	929	780	640	507	391	305	211	190	140	8,655
4. Specialty Trade Contractors	271	500	611	726	702	731	635	587	535	450	389	304	229	6,670
5. Heavy and Civil Engineering Construction	159	322	436	518	516	508	455	422	324	291	236	201	148	4,536
6. Food Manufacturing	188	403	476	515	511	457	432	350	304	253	195	141	129	4,354
7.Food and Beverage Retailers	604	550	465	400	364	327	243	218	178	138	157	120	87	3,851
8. Nursing and Residential Care Facilities	142	297	347	368	415	376	355	322	296	248	209	171	136	3,682
9.Gasoline Stations and Fuel Dealers	214	363	380	405	406	348	314	292	240	197	173	131	84	3,547
10. Social Assistance	130	215	248	284	283	259	238	203	170	152	128	111	89	2,510
11.Motor Vehicle and Parts Dealers	88	170	214	240	271	242	214	168	171	141	140	107	70	2,236
12. Repair and Maintenance	158	189	220	241	235	217	175	185	146	108	90	75	65	2,104
13. Accommodation	81	138	157	219	220	227	207	183	184	121	116	99	70	2,022
14. Construction of Buildings	75	148	206	190	208	218	201	185	160	137	115	95	81	2,019
15. Support Activities for Mining	37	106	166	190	232	211	187	170	158	138	125	97	93	1,910

Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.

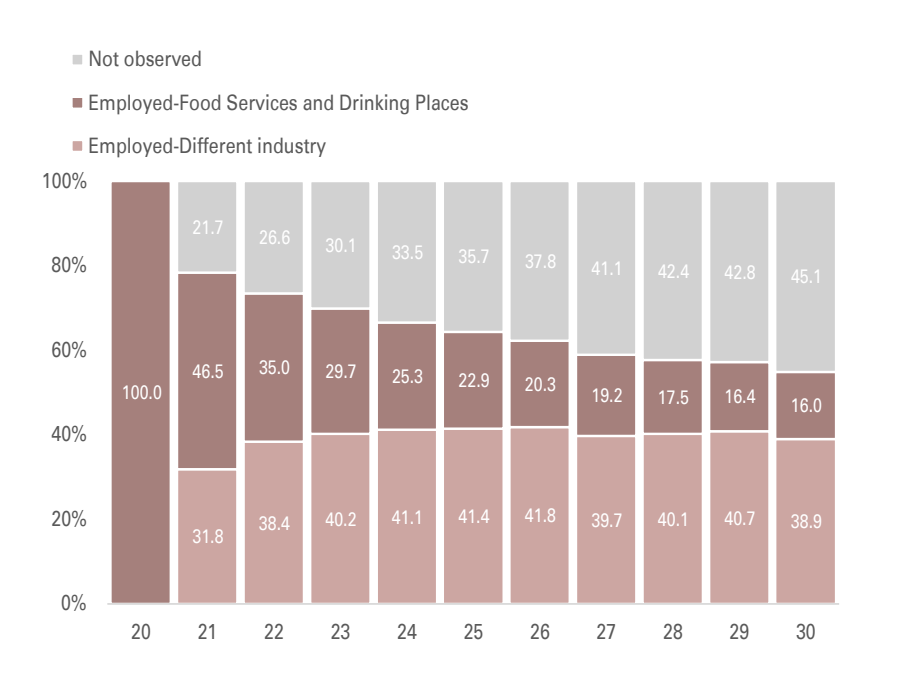
Notes: The reduction in cell sizes across ages may reflect several factors, including individuals leaving employment, moving to industries outside the top 15, or the fact that we are unable to observe the entire population at all ages because the data form an unbalanced panel.
Industry names follow the 2022 North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) three digit industry titles.

Case study: Employment persistence in Food Services and Drinking Places among people with a history of OJJ involvement

As a case study of employment persistence in a low-wage sector, we define a cohort consisting of OJJ-involved individuals at age 20 who were employed, either full-year or part-year, in Food Services and Drinking Places, which is the industry that employs by far the most individuals within this population. We follow this cohort for 10 years to assess the extent to which workers remain in the industry versus transition to employment in other sectors (see Figure 33). By age 30, 45.1 percent of workers who were employed in the industry at age 20 are no longer observed in UI wage records, 38.9 percent transitioned to a different industry and only 16.0 percent remain employed in the industry.

These results suggest that Food Services and Drinking Places primarily operates as an entry-level sector characterized by substantial turnover and mobility, rather than sustained long-term attachment for most workers. At the same time, the persistence of employment for a meaningful subset of workers indicates that the industry continues to serve as a stable employment base for some individuals into their 30s.

Figure 33. Employment persistence at the Food Services and Drinking Places subsector, from ages 20-30



Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.

Annual wages by subsectors

While publicly available data provide information on prevailing wage levels across industries in Louisiana and identify higher- and lower-paying sectors, it is essential to examine wage patterns specifically for our study population. Individuals with a history of juvenile justice involvement may face distinct labor market constraints that are not visible in aggregate statistics. Although juvenile records are sealed, these individuals may experience gaps in education, limited work experience, and reduced human and social capital. Such disadvantages can make them more vulnerable in the labor market and may limit their ability to access and secure higher-paying positions.

Figure 34 presents median annual wages for individuals employed full year in each of the 15 most common industries, shown separately by age category. Two patterns are notable. First, median wages vary substantially across industries at each age group. Second, wage levels are not aligned with the size of the industry's employment share. For example, Support Activities for Mining (e.g., support activities for oil and gas operations) is the smallest industry among the top 15 in terms of employment, yet it exhibits the highest median wages ($48,780 at ages 20-24 and $61,680 at ages 25-29). This skill-intensive industry exhibits both high wages and large career gains. Blanco Center analysis of ACS data shows similar wages in this industry for individuals aged 20–24 in the broader Louisiana workforce ($46,320). However, by ages 25–29, wages increase more rapidly in the general population (median annual wage $75,910) than among individuals with a history of justice involvement. This suggests that while entry wages may be similar, wage growth within these occupations may be slower for justice-involved individuals. Future research could explore the factors contributing to these differences.

On the other hand, Food Services and Drinking Places, the industry with the highest number of employed individuals is one of the lowest wage industries ($15,450 among 20-24-year-olds and $18,180 among 25-29-year-olds). The lowest wage industry for our population is Food Manufacturing at $13,620 and $16,100 for 20-24 and 25-29-year-olds, respectively. Lowest-paying industries display flatter age gradients, suggesting limited advancement pathways, along with potential higher turnover. A comparison with ACS data for the general population working in Food Services and Drinking Places shows a similar pattern at younger ages but diverges over time. Among individuals aged 20–24, median wages in the general population are $15,360, which is only slightly above the median observed in our sample. However, by ages 25–29, wages in the general population increase to $24,540, considerably higher than those observed among individuals with OJJ involvement.

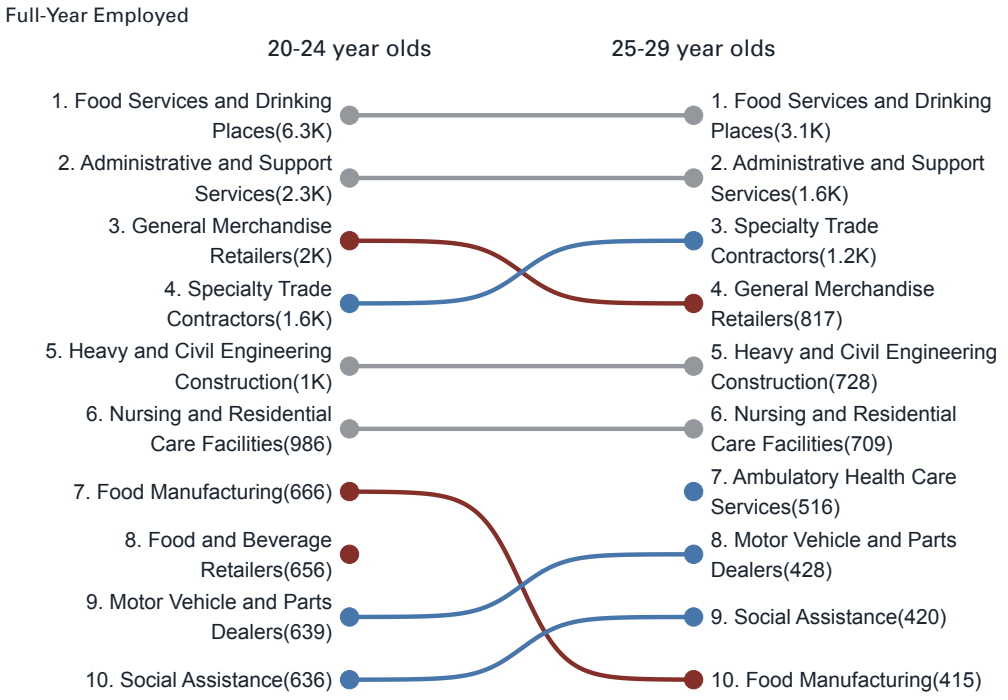
Figure 34. Median wage for full-year workers and for the most common 15 industries, for most common to least common industry, by age groups

Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.
Notes: Wages are reported in constant 2024 dollars and were adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Industry names follow the 2022 North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) three digit industry titles.

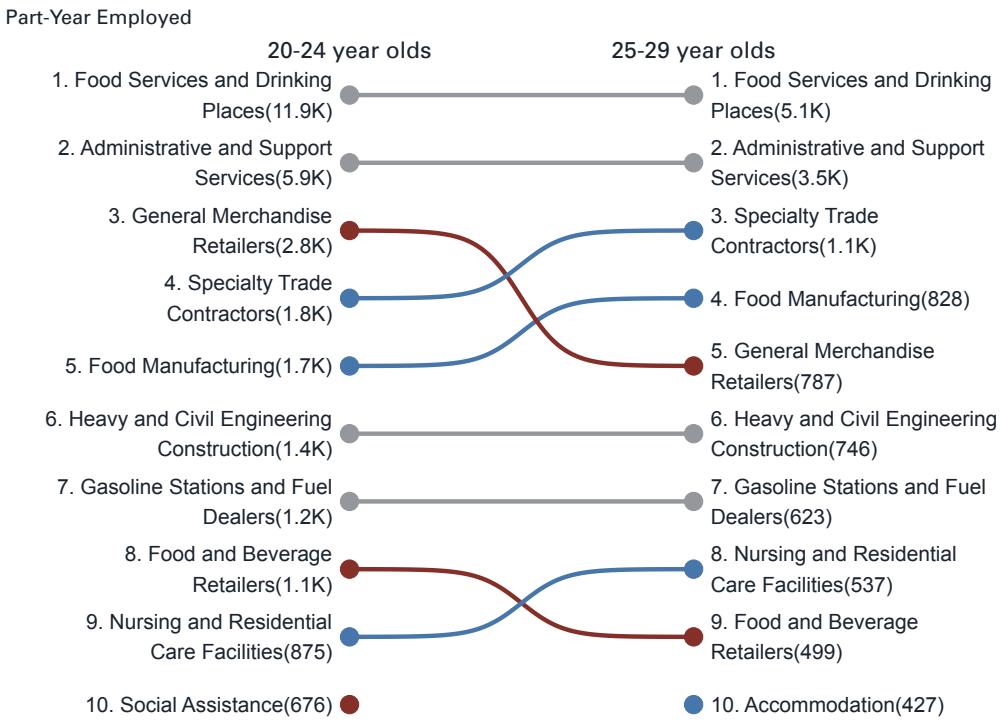
Transitions across industries

Finally, we provide a more general summary of age-related shifts in industry of employment by comparing the ten most common industries or subsectors among OJJ-involved workers ages 20-24 with those ages 25-29, for both full- and part-year workers (see Figure 35). While several industries maintain similar rankings across age groups, such as Food Services and Drinking Places and Administrative and Support Services, other patterns indicate meaningful transitions. Among full-year workers, for example, Ambulatory Health Care Services is not among the top ten industries for ages 20-24 but rises to seventh most common industry for ages 25-29. Food Manufacturing shifts modestly in rank, moving from seventh among workers 20-24 to tenth among workers 25-29. In contrast, changes among part-year workers are smaller. General Merchandise Retailers ranks third among part-year workers ages 20-24 and declines to fifth among those ages 25-29.

Figure 35. Ranking of the top 10 industries among people with a history of OJJ involvement, by age group



Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.
Notes: Industry names follow the 2022 North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) three digit industry titles.



Source: Blanco Center analysis of LA FIRST data.
Notes: Industry names follow the 2022 North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) three digit industry titles.

4.2.5 Summary of findings for people with a history of juvenile justice involvement

This report successfully identified 34,228 juveniles released from OJJ's care between 2009 and 2023 and linked their data with UI wage records from 2014-2024.

1. At different ages (18-30), between 44.3 percent and 56.4 percent of those with juvenile justice involvement were not found in the UI wage records, meaning they were not employed in W-2 employment in Louisiana during the observed years.

2. Among those with at least one UI wage record per year, the majority were part-year or intermittent workers. For example, at age 19, 38.4 percent of the population were part-year or intermittent workers while only 17.1 percent were full-year employed.

3. By age 30, 45.8 percent of a cohort of OJJ-involved who were full-year workers at age 20 remained full-year workers, while 33.3 percent were no longer observed working.

4. Variations by sex and race show that males and Black individuals were less likely to be employed at different ages when compared to females and White individuals.

5. There are employment differences by type of involvement with OJJ. Those under supervision had higher full-year employment than those ever in custody (24.8 compared to 12.0 percent) when 20-24 years old.

6. Continuing with involvement characteristics, 11.9 percent of 20-24-year-olds involved with OJJ three episodes or more worked full year, compared to 22.1 percent among those involved with OJJ only once.

7. Variations in employment by type of most severe delinquent offense were observed. 18.4 percent of 20-24-year-olds with a violent offense worked full-year, compared to 19.3 percent of those with a property non-violent offense, 21.4 percent of those with a drug offense, and 22.2 percent of those with a status offense.

8. For full-year workers, wages rise steadily with age, with the median increasing from about $10,670 at age 18 to $31,770 by age 30. In contrast, part-year workers earn substantially less across all ages, and their wage growth is modest, with the median reaching $4,430 by age 30.

9. At ages 20-24, males earn approximately $7,450 more than females. At ages 25-29 the median wage difference between females and males is approximately $11,800.

10. At ages 20-24, median wages of White individuals are $26,930, higher than what Black ($16,960) and other races ($22,690) earn. The differences become more pronounced at ages 25 to 29.

11. Those with a status offense as the most severe adjudication were found to have the lowest median wages when in full-year employment, earning median wages of $18,290 (20-24 year-olds) and $23,580 (25–29-year-olds)

12. At 20-24 years, the median real wage of those employed four quarters and with only one episode with OJJ is $20,990, while for those with three or more episodes is $16,120.

13. At age 18, Food Services and Drinking Places is the most prevalent industry (employing 5,252 individuals released from OJJ between 2009-2023), followed by Administrative and Support Services.

14. Support Activities for Mining is the smallest industry among the top 15 in terms of employment, yet it exhibits the highest median wages ($48,780 at ages 20-24 and $61,680 at ages 25-29).

15. Industry of employment is similar between ages 20-24 and 25-29, but full-year workers show more noticeable shifts while part-year workers experience only modest changes.

5. Conclusion and future research

5.1 Conclusion

Several main messages emerge regarding employment outcomes among justice-involved individuals in Louisiana. First, many people in this population face significant challenges in the labor market. Only a small share is employed full-year, while the majority of those working experience intermittent employment (i.e., part-year employment) characterized by periods of unemployment or no formal employment in Louisiana at all. This pattern is observed among both adults discharged from parole and individuals with a history of juvenile justice involvement, although the challenges appear more pronounced among adults.

Second, wages among part-year workers are extremely low. For many individuals, these earnings are unlikely to be sufficient to support a household or even a single person. Individuals who do secure full-year employment earn substantially higher wages; and, in many cases, their earnings are comparable to those observed in the same industries in the broader labor market in Louisiana. However, our findings show that justice-involved individuals are most likely to be employed in lower-paying industries, and our descriptive analysis suggests that wage growth for justice-involved individuals may be more limited over time, with slower increases compared with workers in the general population, a pattern that should be further studied.

Third, the industries employing this population are relatively consistent over time. A small number of industries account for a large share of employment among justice-involved individuals, and these sectors tend to offer relatively low wages (e.g., food services and drinking places). At the same time, fewer individuals access higher-paying industries, particularly in sectors such as construction and oil and gas, suggesting that more stable and better-paying employment opportunities are possible for part of the population.

Finally, several demographic and justice-involvement characteristics appear to play an important role in employment outcomes. For example, factors that suggest prior work experience, as well as higher levels of education or training, are associated with better outcomes. At the same time, differences by demographic characteristics and broader structural factors also persist, suggesting the need for further research on these questions.

5.2 Future research

Causes and Consequences of Criminal and Delinquent Acts is a yearly report that leverages the LA FIRST data system to conduct policy-relevant research aimed at better understanding the challenges and opportunities within the juvenile and criminal justice systems and the individuals affected by them. Each year, the report will explore pressing topics, with the goal of expanding this research portfolio

through additional outputs such as technical publications, policy briefs, and other products that can inform policy discussions in Louisiana.

The present report provides a general overview of employment outcomes among justice-involved individuals. While these findings offer important descriptive insights, they also point to several areas where additional research is needed to better understand the mechanisms shaping these outcomes. For example, while industry provides useful information about where individuals are employed, occupation offers a more precise understanding of the types of jobs they hold. Within the healthcare industry, for instance, maintenance and sanitation staff do not earn the same wages as physicians or registered nurses. Future reports should consider incorporating occupational information, or an approximation using Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes, to provide a more detailed assessment of employment outcomes.

Beyond this methodological improvement, several substantive questions remain based on the findings of the present study and could be explored in future reports. The following examples are illustrative and not exhaustive:

- How employment outcomes vary based on participation in educational or workforce programs during incarceration.
- The characteristics and incarceration experiences of individuals who secure and maintain employment for at least five years after release.
- Differences between juveniles who later become involved with adults corrections and those who do not.
- The degree of alignment between programs completed during incarceration and the industries in which individuals ultimately work.
- How experiences during parole influence subsequent employment outcomes.
- More detailed analyses of employment trajectories, such as sequence analyses of quarter-to-quarter employment patterns.
- The role of substance use and substance abuse treatment in shaping employment outcomes.
- Linking additional datasets to better understand individuals who are not observed in wage records, including whether they are enrolled in education, have moved out of state, or are engaged in other activities not captured in the data.

6. Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACS	American Community Survey
CAJUN	Corrections and Justice Unified Network
CCCDA	Causes and Consequences of Criminal and Delinquent Acts
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease of 2019
CPI	Consumer Price Index
FRED	Federal Reserve Economic Data
GED	General Educational Development
JETS	Juvenile Electronic Tracking System
LA FIRST	Louisiana's Foundational Integrated Research System for Transformation
LW	Louisiana Works
OJJ	Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice
OTS	Louisiana Office of Technology Services
DPS&C	Louisiana Department of Public Safety & Corrections
QCEW	Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages
NAICS	North American Industry Classification System
SOC	Standard Occupational Classification
UI	Unemployment Insurance

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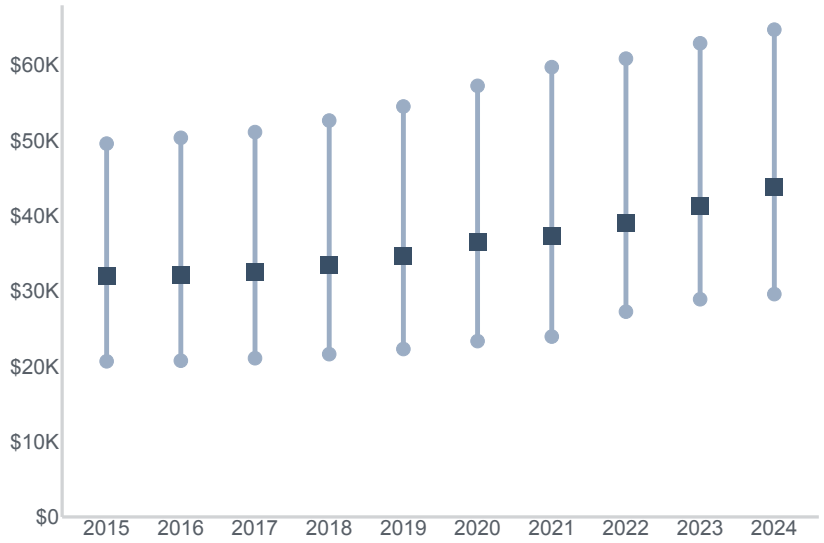
8. Appendix

8.1 Employment patterns in Louisiana and the US

Before exploring employment outcomes for our specific population, as presented in section 3 of this report, we use data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics to study national and state trends of these outcomes. Overall, nominal wages are growing in Louisiana. Figure 36 presents trends in the median, 25th, and 75th percentile wages across all occupations in Louisiana from 2015 to 2024. Exploring the range of outcomes in wages between the 25th and 75th percentiles of the distribution allow us to observe the range of potential outcomes in work, rather than relying only on the median The lower end of the distribution (25th percentile) grew by approximately 43.2%, the median by 36.9%, and the 75th percentile by 30.5%. Specifically, the 25th percentile wage rose from $20,660 to $29,580 from 2015 to 2024, with a higher percentage change recorded from 2021 to 2022. The median wage increased from $31,980 to $43,770, with a larger change from 2021 to 2022, while the 75th percentile wage increased from $49,560 to $64,690, with a larger percentage change from 2018 to 2019. For reference, 100%, 138% and 150% of the federal poverty level for a single adult in Louisiana for 2024 were $15,060, $20,783, and $22,590 respectively (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, n.d.).

Figure 36. Median, 25th percentile, and 75th percentile wages of all occupations in Louisiana, 2015-2024



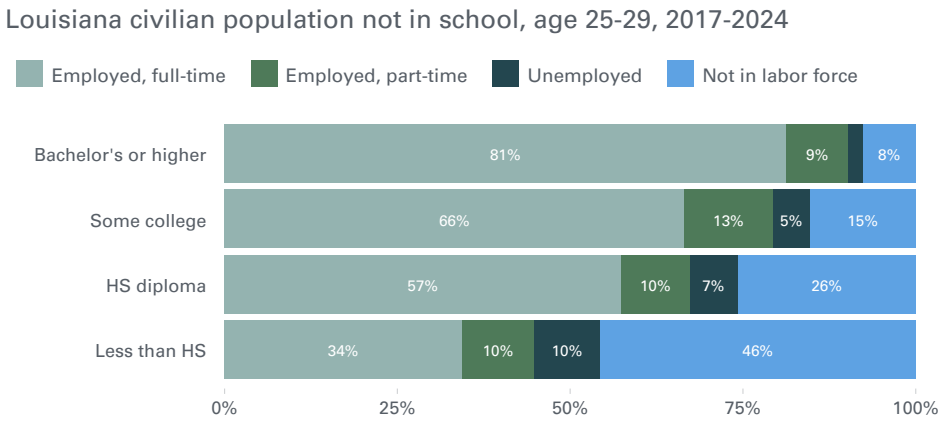
Source: Blanco Center analysis of Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics).

Using Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, we identify the highest paying, lowest paying, and fastest growing industries in the United States. Industries such as utilities, support activities for mining, petroleum and coal products manufacturing, heavy and civil engineering construction, and pipeline transportation rank among the highest paying, with mean annual wages exceeding $70,000. However, these industries typically employ a smaller share of workers compared with lower paying sectors. In contrast, industries such as gasoline stations and fuel dealers, food services and drinking places, food and beverage retailers, accommodation, social assistance, and support activities for agriculture and forestry rank among the lowest paying, with mean annual wages below $45,000. At the same time, industries such as ambulatory health care services, social assistance, and electric power generation are projected to experience some of the fastest employment growth between 2024 and 2034 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2025).

8.2 Labor force participation statistics for people 25-29 in Louisiana

Figure 37 was created by the Blanco Center using data from the American Community Survey (ACS) to serve as benchmarks for the discussion of this report's findings. For a detailed description of the methodology used to construct these indicators and visualizations, please refer to the appendix of the 2025 Louisiana Employment Outcomes Report (Habans et al. 2025).

Figure 37. Labor force participation by education in Louisiana



Source: Blanco Center analysis of IPUMS USA (U.S. Census and American Consumer Survey).