



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS MAYOR KATJANA BALLANTYNE

MEMORANDUM

To: Honorable City Council
From: Mayor Katjana Ballantyne
Re: Prison labor prohibition
Date: December 9, 2025

Background

In response to the City's prior use of MCI painting services, the City Council unanimously passed City Ordinance section 2-375 titled "Prison labor services prohibited" in October 2020. As a sitting member of the Council at that time, I fully supported this action. As Mayor, my administration has faithfully sought to follow and adhere to the ban.

Prohibited Actions Under the Ordinance

The ordinance bars the city from procuring, contracting, hiring, using, or retaining "any labor or services performed, in part or in whole, by people who are serving a residential sentence in a jail..." Finished products and goods are not included in the ban. This gap in the ordinance was recently highlighted following a press inquiry when the City became aware that the Veterans Services Office had purchased finished products such as flags and Purple Heart signs from MassCOR.

While the City continues to comply with the ordinance as it is currently drafted, I fully support and agree with the values underlying this policy, particularly the concern regarding substandard wages for incarcerated individuals.

Next Steps

I have directed the City's Law Department and the Procurement Department to begin researching this issue and to recommend language that may be able to address the gap related to finished products. My administration is also committed to establishing stronger procedures to ensure that all relevant staff are informed of the existing prohibition.

I recommend that the incoming Mayoral Administration expand the ban to include products and goods and implement this change in the new year, to the extent practicable.

