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Testimony in Support of HB: 5237, An Act Concerning Fair Chance Employment

Good Evening, my name is Darryl Brackeen, Jr. I am the Alderman, on the New Haven Board of Alders representing the 26th District in New Haven. For the record, I support HB: 5237 An Act Concerning Fair Chance Employment also known as “Ban the Box.” Many of our city residents have been greatly affected by the injustice as a result having to indicate their past criminal history when filling out an application. A mistake from the past shouldn’t become a life sentence to joblessness.

Every day across America, hardworking qualified men and women who are diligently seeking employment and have often found stumbling blocks and hiring obstacles because of their past arrest or conviction.

The current system in place today creates a trigger that would automatically disqualify ex-offenders when checking off one simple box which would therefore place them into a secondary category or out of the applicant pool. For example, I have heard stories from several individuals who have had negative experiences and has complete distrust in the system as it exists today. After hearing from these individuals, every one of them asked one basic question, “Why should I have to check off a box when I have served my time? I want to be a productive citizen!”

This is an example of the systematic injustice that has plagued our state and country for decades, resulting in leaving more than 70 million Americans behind. This figure represents nearly one in three U.S. adults with a record, therefore, becoming victims of a vicious cycle. Unfortunately and quite frequently, many young adults who look like me become a statistic and a number in the American prison industry, where people get out, can’t find work that sustains them and their families, and in a moment of hopelessness, they may fall back into their old ways, leading them back into the prison system.

In reality, many of these young people have not had the opportunity to lay a foundation to their futures. A poor choice from the past should not become a life sentence to joblessness and hopelessness. Many people claim that while incarcerated, individuals should take advantage of various training programs offered. However, after speaking with many who have taken advantage of those programs while incarcerated, have found that those programs are not up to par with what the job market demands when they are released.

It is my belief that the legislation before us to Ban the Box in the state of Connecticut has been a long time coming. This proposed legislation will give ex-offenders a fair chance or better yet, a fresh start. In the City of New Haven, our Mayor, Toni Harp and our Community Services Administration has made Ban the Box and the

re-entry of offenders back into our society as a priority. As a result, it led to the creation of Project Fresh Start, which has carried the torch for justice concerning banning the box on all city job applications, giving citizens the tools they need to receive viable employment. This is the kind of progress that is needed across this state. This is the time to make our democracy work for everyone, no matter who they are or where they come from.

I urge you to support this legislation, HB: 5237 An Act Concerning Fair Chance Employment, for the good of all people and our society.

Thank you.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Darryl J. Brackeen, Jr.", with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke at the end.

Darryl J. Brackeen, Jr.
Alderman, 26th Ward