

March 2, 2016

Dear Labor and Public Employees Committee,

My name is Sharon L. Castelli, CEO of the Chrysalis Center, Inc. We are a state-wide social services organization and I am providing testimony for you today regarding **H.B. No. 5237 AN ACT CONCERNING FAIR CHANCE EMPLOYMENT**. Our organization provides an employment program for "returning citizens" (individuals formally incarcerated and released on parole).

Research indicates that one of the biggest factors of successful integration back to the community is having a job. However, this is extremely difficult for many of these individuals due to having to "check the box" of a felony conviction. Additionally, the chance of recidivism goes up exponentially without a job in the first 90 days of release.

Even the most motivated individuals have difficulty finding a job in the first 90 days due to the felony conviction that is disclosed at application. Requiring employers to eliminate this step in the application process will most certainly increase the chances of employment for many of these individuals.

Many employers that have taken a chance on the returning citizens in our employment program tell us they are the hardest working and most committed employees they have. In speaking with these employed individuals, they consistently tell me how grateful they are to have been given an opportunity to prove themselves and wouldn't do anything to jeopardize their employment.

The elimination of the felony conviction question or at least not asking the question on an employment application until after employer has met the candidate is good policy and will ensure successful reintegration for the returning citizen, a chance for their families to have their loved ones involved in their lives, a chance for these individuals to become mentors to others and will save the state a lot of money in recidivism and incarceration costs.

Chrysalis Center is an organization that believes in a "hand up not a hand out" approach in working with our clients. We also believe that the "second chance" that our participants get with employers has been highly successful. At Chrysalis, we do not ask anything about any criminal convictions until after the person has been judged on their skills and resume and has been invited in for an interview. This allows candidates to "get in the door" and not be pre-judged and find that their resume ended up in the garbage. With this approach we have screened highly skilled candidates and have indeed hired staff that has felony convictions.

Let me be clear that I am not proposing that violent or harmful people are accepted to work at the agency; however, people in poverty, those in desperate survival situations or those that have exercised bad judgment should not have to pay a lifetime for their mistakes. They have "done their time" and

without a place of employment to go to will usually result in re-incarceration and other unnecessary consequences.

Thank you for your consideration on this very important matter and please contact me if I can answer any questions.

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