

City of New Haven

Toni N. Harp – Mayor



Good afternoon, Senator Gomes, Representative Tercyak, Ranking, and other members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee.

My name is Toni Harp; I'm the Mayor of New Haven. On behalf of the city and its residents, welcome! We're delighted you're here.

Thank you for bringing today's public hearing 'on the road' to our city. Employment issues loom large in Connecticut's urban centers, where many residents, particularly minority residents, endure unemployment rates far greater than statewide averages, along with widespread *underemployment*.

I'm grateful for this opportunity to testify before you. In just a word, I encourage you to continue your minimum wage 'fight for 15.' Connecticut's legal minimum wage must allow those who earn it the chance to afford essentials in terms of housing, food, and transportation. Today's minimum wage does not.

I'm also here in support of the Connecticut Fair Chance Employment Act (H.B. 5237), and I'm here to urge your favorable consideration and passage.

This bill is meant to address another issue of critical concern in this city: pre-judgement – that is to say, prejudicial treatment – of job applicants with criminal records.

Today many of us are here on their behalf: those who made mistakes, accepted the consequences of those mistakes, and who now are trying to rejoin their community and lead responsible, productive lives.

If enacted, HB 5237 would align private sector employers with those in the public sector – and several national companies – and prohibit questions about an applicant's criminal background from initial employment applications.

I'm proud to say the City of New Haven has already enacted a "ban the box" ordinance to keep that question off city job applications.

This 'ban the box' issue really comes down to two things. The first of these is judgment: who among us has led a mistake-free life? Who among us then, is justified to hold another's mistake against him or her indefinitely?

The second point of this is about forgiveness and providing a second chance for those who previously engaged in anti-social behavior. Doesn't it simply make the most sense – common sense – to do all we

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can to bring these people back into the fold? Shouldn't we do everything possible to help them return to their communities as responsible, productive parts of our social fabric?

HB 5237 would ensure that employers first evaluate job applicants based on their skills and qualifications, not past mistakes. This new statewide legislation would bring private employers into alignment with cities like ours, and postpone questions about an applicant's criminal background until later in the hiring process.

So again I thank you for being here, I thank you for your interest in this matter, and I thank you for your consideration of this pending legislation. I urge you to 'ban the box' from job applications so more Connecticut residents can enjoy the satisfaction of an honest day's work and an honest day's pay.

Thank you very much.

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