

March 1, 2016

Dear Labor and Public Employees Committee,

I am writing to you regarding **H.B. No. 5237 AN ACT CONCERNING FAIR CHANCE EMPLOYMENT**. I am a Chief Program Officer at Chrysalis Center Inc. with oversight of 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 on an employment application is good policy and will ensure successfully reintegration for the returning citizen, a chance for their families to have their loved one 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.

Thank you for your consideration on this very important matter

Regards

Justine Couvares