

BRIDGES Statement on the City of Cincinnati's Hiring Policy

Broad bans on hiring ex-offenders are too costly for both the community and the ex-offender. We strongly urge the City of Cincinnati, as well as all public and private entities to revise hiring policies which fail to clearly articulate a reasoned approach to hiring ex-offenders. The statistics overwhelm.

Currently in the United States over 7 million Americans are incarcerated or under supervision. This year, 600,000 inmates will return from state and federal facilities and many more from city and county jails nationwide. Ninety-seven percent of those now incarcerated in this country will eventually return to the community. The greatest obstacle for most of these ex-offenders will be finding employment. The challenge is even greater for minorities.

The high rate of incarceration disproportionately affects minorities, especially African American males. In Ohio, African Americans comprise 12% of the general population, but 47.8% of the state's prison population. In Hamilton County, which has the second highest incarceration rate of the state's seventy-seven counties, 70% of the local population is black. Many of these individuals will return to this community with little prospect of obtaining employment, in the public or private sector, due to the stigma of a criminal conviction.

Research confirms recidivism is strongly correlated to unemployment. Ex-offenders are more likely to recidivate when they are unable to find a stable income source in the mainstream economy. Surveys of employers indicate substantial reluctance to hire a person with a criminal record. Forty percent of employers indicate that they would be unwilling to hire an applicant with a criminal record, acknowledging a criminal record cuts a white male's chances of a call-back in half and an African American male's chances by two-thirds (Devah Pager, *Marked Race, Crime, and Finding Work in an Era of Mass Incarceration*, University of Chicago, 2007). As a result, many revert to familiar patterns and within 36 months of reentering the community, 67.5% will be rearrested (U.S. Dept. of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics). On the contrary, it seems those employed develop a sense of self-worth, purpose and responsibility and are less likely to fall back into their old ways.

The cost of police protection, corrections and judicial and legal activities has been estimated at \$214 billion annually. Nearly one-half of this amount was spent by local governments. In recognition of this national problem, many local and national leaders are leading the charge on addressing reentry issues. Municipalities from coast to coast are amending hiring policies to be more inclusive, giving those who have been rehabilitated a second chance.

Given these sobering statistics, BRIDGES for a Just Community joins the Ohio Justice and Policy Center (OJPC) in calling on the City of Cincinnati to reform its current hiring policy to promote inclusion, equity and justice for all applicants, specifically ex-offenders with felony convictions.

The City of Cincinnati, Civil Service Rule 5 Section 12, states, "the Commission may refuse to appoint or examine an applicant . . . who has been convicted of a felony."

Although this rule makes the hiring of an ex-felon discretionary, recent hiring decisions suggest the City applies a blanket ban on the hiring of otherwise qualified,

eligible applicants on the sole basis of a felony conviction, without considering other factors. Excluding otherwise qualified applicants on the basis of a felony conviction, without considering other factors may cause those applicants, who likely will not find employment in the private sector, to resort to a life of crime.

The City of Cincinnati's leadership on this issue will encourage employers in the private sector to help break the cycle of recidivism. BRIDGES is not urging the adoption of a blind hiring policy, but rather recommends the consideration of the following factors when hiring, so a reasonable policy can be designed to determine if an ex-offender might find success in the organization: (1) the nature and gravity of the offense; (2) the time elapsed since the conviction; (3) the age of the applicant at the time of the offense; (4) the number of convictions; (5) any evidence of rehabilitation or mitigation presented by the applicant; and (6) the degree to which the conviction relate to the duties of the job for which the applicant has applied.

In addition to promoting justice, equity, and inclusion, a reasoned approach to hiring ex-offenders will result in increased public safety, a reduced prison population, and improving the well-being of former prisoners and their families, all with less cost to local government and taxpayers.