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Heart of Bluegrass State is Latest to “Ban the Box” with Bipartisan Support; Part of Growing National Movement

Louisville the latest to join dozens of jurisdictions giving qualified job applicants who have past convictions a fair chance

Washington, DC—The Louisville Metro Council voted 26-0 last Thursday in favor of a new law removing the conviction question from job applications for the city and many of its 26,000 vendors. The bipartisan victory was praised as “[compassionate legislation](#)” by the mayor. This win in the South follows on the heels of a similar policy change in [Charlotte, North Carolina](#), and a recent Midwest victory. An [Indianapolis ordinance](#) passed 26-2 in late February, with the support of the Republican mayor.

Known as “ban the box,” the ordinances do not ban background checks but instead tell employers to postpone them until later in the hiring process, so that job applicants can be reviewed on their qualifications first. The policy seeks to mitigate the stigma of a conviction that makes it so difficult even for highly qualified job-seekers to be fairly considered for work.

These recent wins and the unanimous passage of private-employer ban-the-box in [Baltimore](#) and [San Francisco](#) demonstrate increasingly strong support around the nation for the movement to reduce unfair employment barriers for people with criminal records. Even the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce was a vocal supporter of the local Fair Chance Act. The tally of jurisdictions that have “banned the box” is now up to [ten states](#) (with a few more on the verge of adopting the policy) and almost [60 cities and counties](#).

“In less than 15 years since the first ‘ban the box’ bill was passed, jurisdictions in every region of the country have enacted this common-sense policy to help those with criminal records access the jobs they need to regain self-sufficiency and a sense of purpose,” said **Christine Owens, executive director of the National Employment Law Project**.

Rev. Larry Sykes, a leader of the local group behind the Louisville ordinance, **Citizens of Louisville Organized and United Together**, reflected, “This unanimous decision to ‘ban the box’ is a ‘win-win’ for our city. It will make a huge difference for thousands of people in the city, and by extending the policy to include vendors who do business with the city, there will be thousands of businesses who will earn the benefits of opening their doors more fully to people who are skilled and motivated to be quality employees.”

In order to help local advocates and policy makers track these fast-moving policy changes nationwide and gain access to best practices, the National Employment Law Project will release a comprehensive online toolkit for fair chance campaigns next month, including examples for public education materials and model legislative language.

In Georgia, Republican Governor Nathan Deal [has publicly declared](#) his support of a state policy change that would offer job applicants a fair chance to be judged on their merits first, not their past mistakes. In Louisiana, two new ban-the-box bills—[one for state jobs](#) and the [other for government contractors](#)—are wending their way through the Republican-dominated legislature. In Delaware, Governor Jack Markell endorsed the policy in his [state of the state address](#), declaring, "We should ban the box for state government hires this year... because marginalizing [people with records] helps none of us." New Hampshire, New Jersey and Nebraska also have legislation pending.

Corporations are also recognizing the need for all members of local communities to have a fair chance at employment. Last year, the Target Corporation announced that it would [remove questions about criminal records](#) from its job applications nationwide. The federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has issued [guidance](#) that calls on employers to make individualized assessments instead of blanket exclusions and consider the time passed since the offense and whether it relates to the job.

"If 2013 is any indication of what's to come, we can expect fair chance policies to soon reach a tipping point nationwide and become a widely accepted and routine practice for employers," said NELP Executive Director **Christine Owens**. Last year, the states of California, Maryland, Minnesota, and Rhode Island enacted legislation, and Illinois Governor Pat Quinn issued an executive order removing the background check question from state applications.

The National Employment Law Project is a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization that conducts research and advocates on issues affecting low-wage and unemployed workers. For more about NELP, visit www.nelp.org.

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