

Norwich City Council sets state precedent with Beyond the Box

BY MELANIE SAVAGE Staff Writer

Norwich City Council members set a precedent for the state on Monday, Dec. 1, when they voted unanimously to approve an ordinance that would eliminate the check box asking about a criminal background from applications for city jobs. Hartford, Waterbury, and Bridgeport are all considering similar moves, but Norwich is the first city to actually take action.

"This is one way that we've taken up Obama's challenge to come up with solutions for hope," said LaResse Harvey, of A Better Way Foundation, one of the supporters of the ordinance. Alderman Robert Zarnetske, another supporter, said that the check box on employment applications is an unnecessary means of discrimination. "Minorities in our society are more likely to be targeted for arrest, more likely to be convicted, and less likely to be pardoned when they come out," said Zarnetske. Harvey added that, of the 117 successful applicants for pardon last year, 85 percent were white. "Non-whites have a very slim chance [of pardon]," she said.

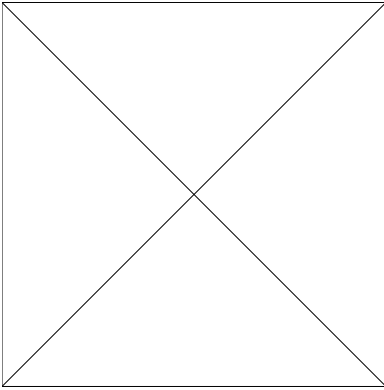
A number of residents spoke in favor of the ordinance during the public portion of the meeting. Those who spoke against said they mainly objected to the way that the issue was being handled. "What are you really doing?" asked one resident. "This is political posturing. This is not going to change a thing." Other residents referred to the ordinance as a "feel good" measure, claiming that very few employees are actually hired through the city's human resources department. "This isn't going to change a thing," said one resident.

In her rebuttal, Connecticut Pardon Team founder Jacqueline Caron reiterated that the ordinance would not eliminate a thorough check of potential applicants. "We are not saying that the city should not do a background check," said Caron, but rather that a background check be moved to an "appropriate point" in the application process.

Before the vote, aldermen acknowledged that there was a "feel good" aspect to the ordinance. "But what it does that is real," said Zarnetske, "is giving 10 percent of the population that was formerly incarcerated an invitation to participate in the economy."

In other business, the City Council unanimously voted to eliminate the obsolete Economic Development Commission, and to grant the Hospice of Southeastern Connecticut tax-exempt status.

The final ordinance under City Council consideration was more hotly contested by citizens and aldermen alike. Despite strong public opposition, the council voted 5-2 in favor of approving a \$2.2 million sewer expansion project in the area of New London Turnpike. The sewer will serve 122 residences, the Beth Jacob Synagogue, and the John B. Stanton School. Several area residents opposed the project, both in person and by letter, saying they couldn't afford the \$9,500 assessment charge, and the \$2,500 tie-in charge. Aldermen Zarnetske and Mark Bettencourt voted against the project. After the vote, several residents stood up to express their dismay. "You've let down your constituents," said one.



All content copyright © 2007 Remindernews unless otherwise noted. All rights reserved.

Please [contact us](#) if you have any questions or comments.