

September 27, 2017

The Honorable Edmund G. Brown, Jr.
Governor of the State of California
State Capitol, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Support for AB 1008 (McCarty) – The Fair Chance Act

Dear Governor Brown:

I am writing to urge your signature on AB 1008 (McCarty), a “ban the box” measure that would send a clear message that California is truly committed to creating meaningful re-entry opportunity for the benefit of the entire state.

There is no better place for this message to be heard. California is home to 8 million people with arrest and conviction histories, and a prison system that currently holds more than 130,000 individuals behind bars. In more than thirty years advocating on behalf of condemned and incarcerated men, women, and children, I have learned that every single person is more than the worst thing they’ve ever done. But those experiences have also shown me that, far too often, they are defined only by that worst act even after their sentences end.

Men and women in California and throughout the country have seen how a record of arrest or conviction can stand as an insurmountable obstacle to employment, sabotaging a job application within the first few questions. Indicating an arrest or conviction history has been shown to greatly reduce the likelihood of an interview opportunity. The consequences are real.

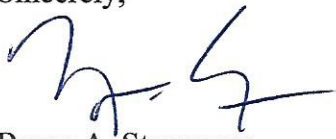
About six in ten people who have been incarcerated are still unemployed a year after release. Even those who manage to secure work are heavily burdened by their status, and can expect to earn 40 percent less than those without past imprisonment. These disadvantages end up concentrated in communities of color and among the poor – and also on the young, as nearly half of all American children have a parent with an arrest or conviction history. When we allow barriers to employment and economic mobility to block the advancement of those most in need of assistance and opportunity, we continue and sustain vicious cycles of inequality, instability and historical injustice that wreak havoc on families, neighborhoods, and whole communities for generations. California has seen that happen, as has the nation.

America today imprisons a larger proportion of its citizens than anywhere in the world. That reality was achieved through laws and policies, and a new reality requires new approaches. Your administration has in many ways helped California turn in a new direction, and signing AB 1008 is a chance to make huge gains toward that goal.

If signed, AB1008 will declare that the one in three Californians currently burdened by "the box" are entitled to a fair chance to work. It will announce that the growth of mass incarceration has not created an invisible underclass toward which California's leaders are indifferent. And it will communicate California's commitment to the ideals of redemption and renewal, alongside the recognition that showing mercy to others is an opportunity to earn it for ourselves.

Our futures are all bound, and California's leadership on this issue can benefit the state while helping to guide the country. The reforms you have championed, to reduce the state's prison population and increase rates of release, also require efforts to provide a viable path toward post-release success. Employment is a critical stepping stone on that path, and a step I sincerely hope you will ensure California takes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "B. Stevenson", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Bryan A. Stevenson
Director, Equal Justice Initiative