



For Immediate Release

June 21, 2013

Newark, NJ

## **Senate Labor Committee Continues Deliberation on the New Jersey Opportunity to Compete Act**

*Senate Labor Committee Chair calls a 2<sup>nd</sup> hearing on legislation that would ensure fair hiring practices for individuals with criminal records that are minor and from long ago.*

NEWARK, NJ- June 21, 2013. The New Jersey Senate Labor Committee will hold a follow-up hearing regarding the New Jersey Opportunity to Compete Act, commonly called *Ban the Box*, on Monday June 24 at 9:30am in the Statehouse Annex Committee Room 10. The proposed bill has generated a great deal of interest among legislators and community members alike. Earlier this year, an organization called “Ban the Box New Jersey,” comprised of students from Princeton University, organized a rally in support of the bill which included over 100 youth, community advocates and business leaders. At the first Senate committee hearing held on June 13 more than 50 people came forward to testify— which was more individuals than the committee could accommodate in one day.

The bill, sponsored by Senators Sandra B. Cunningham, Raymond Lesniak and M. Teresa Ruiz and Assemblywoman Bonnie Watson Coleman, delays criminal history inquiries until later in the application process, encouraging employers to consider an applicant’s qualifications, skills, and personal attributes. The initial hearing focused on ensuring that the proposed language of the bill promotes economic opportunity while protecting the ability of businesses to exercise their discretion in selecting their workforce and ensuring the safety of their work environment.

In his testimony at the initial hearing, Cornell William Brooks, President and CEO of the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, noted that “One in four Americans has a criminal record, most of whom have never been to prison, never committed a serious crime, never committed a violent crime. Most have merely been arrested and many merely convicted of minor offenses. And yet having even a minor criminal record can seem like a life sentence of underemployment or unemployment for many. Criminal records represent an employment barrier that does not surround prisons but rather encompasses entire families and communities. This legislation doesn’t guarantee anybody anything— other than an opportunity to compete for work.”

Testifying in support of the bill at the initial hearing, CEO of Newark Alliance, Alfred C. Koeppel said “nothing in the Act requires an employer to hire an ex-offender. The prospective employer retains the discretion to revoke a conditional offer. All that the Act does is require the employer to *reasonably evaluate* the offense in the context of the ‘duties and settings’ of the job.”

The policy shortcomings the New Jersey Opportunity to Compete Act seeks to remedy are both significant and time-sensitive, as indicated by the speed and thoroughness the Senate Committee is evaluating this bill. The hearing scheduled for Monday will be the second hearing in two weeks on the bill. The New Jersey Institute for Social Justice is hopeful that this important legislation will be passed this summer, providing everyone in the State of New Jersey equal opportunity to pursue the American Dream.

*For additional information, please contact Scott Nolen, Equal Justice and Communications Director, at 973-624-9400, Ext. 32, or at [snolen@njisj.org](mailto:snolen@njisj.org).*

\*\*\*\*\*