



For Immediate Release  
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## **New Legislation Opens Opportunity to Compete for Employment**

NEWARK, NJ- February 7, 2013. The state of New Jersey will soon be considering The New Jersey Opportunity to Compete Act, commonly referred to as *Ban the Box*, which takes a major step toward leveling the playing field for all job applicants by eliminating “the box” on an application that asks job candidates to disclose their criminal history. Criminal history inquiries would, however, merely be delayed until later in the hiring process to encourage employers to focus on the candidate’s qualifications, rather than solely on past mistakes. While this bill limits inquiries about criminal history on the initial job application, it does not prevent employers from conducting background checks or using criminal history information when appropriate or when mandated by law. Over the past fifteen years, 49 jurisdictions have enacted *Ban the Box* policies, including the states of Colorado, Connecticut, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and New Mexico.

Senators Sandra B. Cunningham and M. Teresa Ruiz and Assemblywoman Bonnie Watson Coleman sponsored this bill called the “New Jersey Opportunity to Compete Act.” Senator Cunningham has played a key role in ensuring that the proposed legislation 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. Senator Cunningham, Alfred C. Koeppel, CEO of Newark Alliance and the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice convened several of the state’s largest business associations, as well as industry leaders, and have met with Mayors from across the state to gain their input on this important policy question. Senator Cunningham said, “I am not sure if a day goes by that I do not have a constituent, who has the desire and work ethic to be successful, walk into my office feeling defeated because employers are still holding mistakes from 5, 10 or 15 years ago against them. Every person in the state of New Jersey deserves the opportunity to compete for employment.” Assemblywoman Bonnie Watson-Coleman added, “Three years ago, I sponsored a set of reentry bills to address some of the educational, health and employment barriers people face when they come home from prison, but we know that eliminating barriers to employment is a key component of a sensible policy to promote growth and economic development. As a result of this bill, hundreds of thousands of New Jersey residents will have access to the American Dream— a chance to rise or fall on your own merit.”

According to a report by the National Employment Law Project, one in four adults now has an arrest or conviction record. Moreover, according to a survey conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management, more than 90% percent of companies reported using criminal background checks for their hiring decisions. A majority of the nation's 65 million people with criminal records are people of color, and these communities are among those most impacted by these practices. Cornell William Brooks, Esq., President and CEO of NJISJ said, "This legislation promotes competition, where everyone wins: those with the 'will and skill' to work have the opportunity to compete for jobs based on the whole record not merely a criminal record; employers retain the sole decision making authority to hire the best and New Jersey sets a national business standard for excellence and fairness."

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