

The Advocate

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Fight to 'Ban the Box' continues

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NEWARK — The quest to eliminate a question about criminal records from job applications continues.

The Newark Think Tank on Poverty hosted a seminar Friday for employers about how they can provide a second chance for people with criminal records and even gain benefits from the government while doing so.

"Ban the Box is but one small slice of fair hiring," said Stephen Johnson Grove, deputy director of the Ohio Justice and Policy Center. "It's a great step, but it's not the last and only step."

Johnson Grove encourages employers to be fully

versed on exactly what crimes people would have had to be convicted of to not legally be hired by the company. Ohio has about 150 laws that inhibit former criminals from being hired, but there is no law that states all former felons are not able to work in businesses, he said.

Businesses can receive tax credits for hiring former felons, he said. They also can receive a \$5,000 bond from the federal government to protect against negligent hiring.

The Newark City Council will look at legislation June 29 that would no longer allow criminal records to have to be indicated on job application forms, according to Councilman Jeremy Blake, a major driver behind the movement in Newark.

Much of the seminar also focused on why its important for employers to give people second chances, with four guest speakers sharing their struggles with criminal records.

Eric Lee, a guest speaker at Friday's event, was first convicted of a crime in the 1970s. That record haunted him for years as he searched for jobs that would help him provide for his two children.

"What does a man have to do to put a bad past behind him?" Lee said he would often ask himself while trying to make ends meet.

Now, after 12 years clean, Lee works at Denison University.

"I'm not the same man I was 20 or 30 years ago," Lee said. "I've accepted responsibility for my past."

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