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Push For States To "Ban The Box" On Job Applications

By Glenn McEntyre

Monday November 2, 2015 6:55 PM

COLUMBUS, Ohio -

Where do you go for work, when your resume includes "convicted felon"?

With record-breaking prison populations, it's a reality more cities and states are starting to face.

Monday President Obama is announcing a plan to help those who've served their time re-integrate into society.

It's called "[Banning the Box](#)"- eliminating the check box on employment applications that disqualifies an applicant from the very start.

And it's already happening here in Central Ohio.

In six months on the job at Sparta Restaurant and Coffee House in Newark, Tina Cole has quickly climbed the ladder.

"To where I actually have a key to the restaurant; that's, like, huge. For him to trust this restaurant into me I can come in and I can open it. I come in and I close it for him," she said.

To understand why "Restaurant Manager" is much more than a title for her, you need to know the job she held previously:

"For 14 years I sold drugs here in Newark," Cole said. "I ruined this community by the things I did and by the drugs I put on the street."

Her crimes earned her 6 years in the Ohio Reformatory for Women. From behind those bars, any kind of future appeared beyond her reach.

"Are my kids going to accept me? Are my family going to accept me? Am I going to be able to take care of myself? Maybe I should just get out and start selling drugs again. That's the mindset you have before you get out," she said.

Through a re-entry program, she found employment, and a chance to show she was more than her crimes.

"I just every day wake up and know I have something to prove- to my kids, to myself, to my community," Cole said.

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Chris Ramsey is the man who hired Tina, and dozens of other convicted felons.

"Oh yeah, I get the risk," he said. "I understand that. But listen, have you ever made a mistake? I can think of a half dozen times in my life that I was one policeman away from having a felony. Because how stupid were you in college? If you were as stupid as I was- this could have been me."

In May, Governor Kasich ordered state agencies to stop requiring job applicants to disclose their criminal history on their application.

Cities like Columbus and Cincinnati had already made the change. In July, the city of Newark followed suit.

"My initial thought was, that's the dumbest thing I've heard of in my life," admits Newark Law Director Doug Sassen.

He says that's before he took a closer look at the proposal.

"A lot of people refer to it as 'ban the box.' I like to call it 'delay the box.' Meaning, you get your first interview, you get your first review, before there is any kind of inquiry into your criminal record," Sassen said.

He says it makes sense not just for the applicants, but for society.

"These returning citizens are coming back. They are going to be here. They have to eat. They have to have a place to live," Sassen said. "They have to have a source of income. Wouldn't we all prefer that it be legal, that it be legitimate?"

Cole believes everyone deserves a second chance if they're willing to work for it.

"I'm a convicted felon. It is what it is. Black and white. I'm a convicted felon, but I'm also a restored citizen," she said.

Newark's version of the "Ban the Box" rule does not apply to positions that require licensure, like police, fire and paramedics.

Background checks are mandatory for anyone applying for those positions.

You'll find more information, including President Obama's proposal for federal job applicants by [clicking here](#).

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