

Testimony in Support of HB 3025

Respectfully Submitted By Joe Baessler, Political Director for Oregon AFSCME

Chair Holvey, members of the Business and Labor Committee my name is Joe Baessler and I work for Oregon AFSCME. We represent 24,000 members around the state and we believe that it is important that everyone in Oregon is treated with fundamental fairness and have the ability to correct the mistakes they have made in their past. We represent local government workers, childcare providers and corrections officers and our members have endorsed the Ban the Box law at the state level. We have asked our employers to make the change in their internal practices and we believe it is the right thing to do for all Oregonians. If people cannot have a chance to turn their lives around it is wound to the entire state. Those employers that have restricts for past convictions like a corrections officer will be exempt but in cases where that is not true potential employees deserve a chance to make a case for themselves without being automatically disqualified.

This bill has the potential to affect a great deal of people. Nearly one-third of Americans have been arrested by age 23. People with prior convictions and arrests are regularly shut out of jobs because of one checked box on their job applications. This prevents many qualified job applicants from obtaining the work they need to support themselves and their families and unfairly limiting job prospects. Barriers to earn a living only perpetuate inequity and trap people in circumstances that lead to more problems. It is very difficult for people with prior convictions and arrests to become law abiding, tax-paying citizens without a job. Removing questions about criminal history from applications creates opportunities for those who've faced the consequences and are unlikely to reoffend. Banning the box won't guarantee the job, but it will give prospective employees an opportunity to explain the circumstances.

Our employers, the City of Portland and Multnomah County, have already removed questions about criminal history from applications for city and county jobs with the strong support of our members there. The bill makes it illegal for employers to use job application forms to ask about criminal history or disqualify an applicant from employment because of a prior conviction unless the conviction is job-related. Employers can only deny applicants based on their criminal histories if the employer determines there is a direct relationship between a job and an applicant's criminal history. Employers can still ask for criminal background checks and HB 3025 will not override any law that prohibits people with certain convictions from working in particular occupations. We feel this gives enough protection for employers to make good decisions while balancing the rights of Oregonians to turn their lives around.