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MAYOR EMANUEL, ALDERMEN INTRODUCE ORDINANCE TO REMOVE EMPLOYMENT BARRIERS FOR RETURNING CITIZENS

Ordinance will fill gap in new state law by applying to 45,000 businesses in Chicago

Mayor Emanuel, Aldermen Walter Burnett, Emma Mitts, Deborah Graham, Jason Ervin, Howard Brookins, Carrie Austin, Michelle Harris, Joe Moore and Ray Suarez introduced an ordinance before City Council today that would remove employment barriers for people with prior arrest or criminal records by prohibiting questions about criminal background at the first stage of the job hiring process, commonly known as a Ban the Box law. The ordinance would close a gap in the State of Illinois' new Ban the Box law by extending this hiring requirement to the roughly 45,000 businesses in the City of Chicago with fewer than 15 employees.

"Too often, qualified people never receive a fair shot at entry-level job opportunities simply because they are forced to check a box on a job application and acknowledge a prior arrest, even if it has no bearing on their ability to do the job," said Mayor Emanuel. "We need to remove hurdles like this to ensure everyone in every neighborhood has the opportunity for a good job and a real path to the middle class."

In addition to closing the gap in the new state law, the proposed ordinance will extend existing City administrative Ban the Box hiring protections to sister agencies. It would also create new penalties for businesses that have violated State and local requirements, and have failed to take remedial actions.

"There are too many obstacles facing people who are serious about starting over after they leave prison," said Alderman Mitts. "This ordinance will help put an end to institutional barriers that can keep people from earning a paycheck and being positive community members."

"This is a common sense move that will ensure consistent rules for businesses of all sizes, and ensure people who have left prison and are trying to turn their life around can be evaluated on their abilities," said Alderman Burnett. "When someone makes a conscious decision to turn over a new leaf, we as a community should support that choice."

Every year, 20,000 people return from prison to communities in Chicago, totaling more than half of the people leaving Illinois prisons. However, many of those qualified for entry-level positions are discriminated out of job opportunities because of prior arrest or criminal records. By prohibiting questions about criminal background at the first stage of the job hiring process, applicants are guaranteed to be initially evaluated on their skills and experience, rather than being rejected because of their past.

A Princeton University study found that the likelihood of a callback for an interview for entry-level positions drops by 50 percent for applicants with an arrest or conviction history. Additionally, without the support or income to build a stable life, many individuals turn back to crime—nearly 57 percent of ex-offenders who return to Cook County commit another crime within three years.

Ban the Box policies do not prohibit employers from ultimately rejecting applicants based on their prior criminal history, rather, these policies ensure returning citizens have a fair shot at the hiring process, and a fair shot at building a productive life for themselves and their communities.

The City's Commission on Human Relations would be responsible for investigating complaints of local ban the box violations received from residents and returning citizens. Final violations will be determined only after a hearing is held with the business owner and the complainant. After a finding of guilt, the Commission may require the Business Owner to pay a fine of up to \$1,000 per incident. Further, the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection will be empowered to take additional corrective action if a business owner does not comply within a reasonable amount of time.

Since taking office, Mayor Emanuel has expanded programs that help returning citizens work toward a second chance. This year, the City connected approximately 2,200 returning citizens with jobs, skills, and other support programs, more than doubling the 900 served in 2011. Additionally, under Mayor Emanuel, The Chicago Transit Authority's "Second Chance Program" quadrupled its annual enrollment, serving more than 800 people since 2011. Through the College 2 Careers program, the City Colleges of Chicago formed strategic partnerships with leading re-entry providers to double the number individuals returning from prison to training for careers in growing sectors. This year, the Chicago Housing Authority will also launch a pilot family reunification program in partnership with reentry providers that will allow 50 returning citizens to move back into CHA housing over the next three years. Finally, in partnership with Senator Van Pelt Watkins, the Mayor successfully fought to triple the state employer tax incentive for returning citizens from \$600 per hire to \$1,500 per hire, ensuring more employers can take advantage of the opportunity to hire job-ready returning citizens.

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