

Expand opportunities for occupational licenses

BACKGROUND

Economic opportunities are sharply limited for Oklahomans who have been involved in the criminal justice system. These Oklahomans face a multitude of barriers to reintegrating with society and becoming economically stable. Those with a felony conviction, even for a non-violent crime, often find themselves locked out of certain professions because they need an occupational license - and they can't get that license due to their history in the criminal justice system.



Oklahoma made some progress in helping the justice-involved access economic opportunities in 2015 with a bill that opened up a limited number of licensed professions to individuals with prior felony convictions. But there is still work left to do – too many Oklahomans who want to work and lead productive lives are prevented from doing so by licensing restrictions. Keeping these Oklahomans out of the workforce hurts us all. It reduces the available talent pool for businesses and makes it harder for the justice involved to support themselves and their families.

THE SOLUTION

Restrictions on who can or cannot get an occupational license should make sense. Universal bans on those with felony convictions that make no distinctions for the seriousness of the crime, or whether the crime relates to the profession being licensed, serve no one's interest.

Now that Oklahoma has voted to make simple drug possession and low-level property crimes misdemeanors, it makes even less sense to have a blanket ban on job licenses for people charged with these crimes in the years when they were felonies. All licensing boards should be required to specify which crimes will result in a denial of a license and demonstrate that those crimes relate to the duties of the job or profession or pose a specific risk to public safety.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Contact your state Representative and Senator and urge them to end blanket bans on job licenses for Oklahomans with a felony record. Ask them to allow felon bans only when it can be demonstrated that those crimes relate to the duties of the job or profession or pose a specific risk to public safety.

To join the grassroots coalition of Oklahomans working to connect Oklahoma values with better budget and tax priorities, visit www.togetherok.org. To receive SMS advocacy alerts on important economic security issues, text **OKECON** to **51555**.

You can look up your Senator and Representative on our website under the “**Advocacy**” tab on our main menu. You can also call the House switchboard at **405-521-2711**, and the Senate switchboard at **405-524-0126**.



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