

Connecticut General Assembly



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Permanent Commission on the Status of Women

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News Release

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Women's Roundtable in Support of "Ban the Box" Movement

Connecticut Fair Chance Coalition Seeks to Eliminate Barriers to Employment

HARTFORD -- For many women, "the box" is a double bind. For both previously incarcerated women, and/or women whose partner has been incarcerated, the standard practice of employers asking about past arrest records can be a road to economic ruin. The Connecticut Fair Chance Coalition has formed to urge legislators to "ban the box," so that families in Connecticut can move beyond this barrier and have a fair chance at gaining employment.

The Fair Chance Coalition is holding a Women's Roundtable Brunch this Saturday, April 23 in Hartford, hosted by State Rep. Robin Porter. The public is invited to attend this forum, which will be a discussion of the impact of discriminatory hiring practices on women and their families.

Currently, the Connecticut General Assembly is considering HB 5237: An Act Concerning Fair Chance Employment, which would "create a set of hiring policies designed to ensure that people with a criminal record are evaluated on the merits of their qualifications, not their past," said Jillian Gilcrest, senior policy analysis for the General Assembly's Permanent Commission the Status of Women. "The bill would also delay background checks until the employer has made a conditional offer to applicants."

Advocates believe that by delaying the background check, employers will be better able to evaluate prospective job candidates on their skills, interview presentation and work ethic. One such worker is Tanya Wiggins. Wiggins, a substance abuse counselor from Hartford, will speak at the roundtable about her experience.

"Banning the box will stop the never-ending cycle," Wiggins says. "You do your time, pay your debt to society, make restitution, and then, when you get your life together and apply for a job so you won't be a drain on society, that box is always in your way. You're constantly being reminded of your past, and the cycle of non-productivity starts all over again." Wiggins, who served just two months for a minor drug offense, had been repeatedly turned down for work before her current employment.

Rep. Robyn Porter introduced the bill because, "Women, especially those who have a criminal history, are facing discriminatory hiring practices when they apply for jobs. To address this issue, I have co-sponsored the 'Fair Chance Employment Act,' which will remove the box on job applications that asks

applicants if they have a criminal record. By doing so, this bill will help to remove a prominent barrier to employment for qualified workers with criminal histories. After all, they've paid their debt to society and deserve a fair chance to fully redeem and support themselves. This is why I strongly believe 'banning the box' would be a huge step forward in reforming Connecticut's criminal justice system. Not to mention, this legislation would help to drive good policy and revenue growth in Connecticut. For these reasons, I will continue to push for the passage of this legislation."

And according to Connecticut Fair Chance Coalition organizer Arvia Walker, "Taking the step to become a state where we are Fair Chance employers will bring us closer to the goal of being a second chance society. No one should be permanently barred from the workforce because of past mistakes. Not only do the effects of lack of employment impact the individual but their families suffer, children end of being punished and the outcomes for their future are limited. It's an injustice to prevent people from working and providing for their families. We need to reduce barriers for people and move beyond the box."

The Roundtable will be held at the Studio at Billings Forge, 559 Broad St., Hartford on Sat., April 23 at 11 a.m. Free childcare will be provided.

RSVP is required at <http://bit.ly/fairchancebrunch>

Participants are asked to bring a donation of a feminine hygiene product to help Young Women Rising's #ProjectPeriod, which distributes the products to women in transitional housing and/or who are seeking shelter.

For more information, contact Arvia Walker at arvia.walker@ppsne.org; 860-944-7650.

About the PCSW: The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women was formed in 1973 under Sec. 46a-1 of the Connecticut General Statutes to study and improve Connecticut women's economic security, health and safety; to promote consideration of qualified women to leadership positions and to work toward the elimination of gender discrimination. As a non-partisan arm of the General Assembly, the agency monitors, critiques and recommends changes to legislation in order to inform public policy, and assesses programs and practices in all State agencies for their effect on the state's women. The PCSW serves as a liaison between government and its diverse constituents, and convenes stakeholders, including the business, non-profit and educational communities, local governments, and the media, in order to promote awareness of women's issues.