



Texas Inmate Families Association
Strengthening families through support, education and advocacy

Dear President Obama:

My name is _____ and I am concerned about the ability of people returning from prison to get jobs in our communities. I am taking the time to make a personal appeal to you to issue an executive order removing the question about criminal history on applications for employment with federal agencies or those who contract with them.

Mr. President, this is more than an issue of employment. This is an issue about human rights, about allowing people to find dignity in what they do and who they are. It is about looking at how this country has thrown millions of men and boys, overwhelmingly black men and young black boys, into cages and then told them when they get out of those cages, "You are not wanted. We don't trust you." But those comments all too often come from the same people who say, "Rehabilitate yourself. Do the right thing. Be a good citizen." How can both be true? How can individuals who have the doors to dignity and opportunity slammed in their faces, over and over, because of an unchangeable part of their history, find the patience and determination necessary to not give in to despair and not return to old habits?

These are not nameless people. These are our family members, friends and neighbors, and they deserve the opportunity to come back to their families and communities and find honest, honorable employment based on what they know and what they can do. Our loved ones are not asking for a handout, Mr. President. They want to help support their family, pay taxes and rejoin the community of the living and the loved.

Mr. President, you have stood before the NAACP and said that "Justice is not only the absence of oppression; it is the presence of opportunity." You went into a prison and you came out shaken, saying that it could have been you in those cages, if not for choices you made that took you down another path.

For the 650,000 men and women leaving our prisons each year, it is not yet about choices. It is in fact not about opportunity. It is still about economic and employment discrimination practiced by the thousands of employers who have contracts with the government worth millions in tax dollars, companies that make billions of dollars each year in profits, whose headquarters and factories sit in cities where entire neighborhoods have been devastated by mass incarceration and whose members leave prison and are denied the slightest chance to show these companies that they have worth, that they can be trusted; that they have intelligence and ambition and determination.

I ask that you do the right thing, Mr. President. I ask that your actions match your words. I ask that you Ban the Box on applications for employment in federal agencies and the companies that contract with them, and that you do it now, and by your actions you model the idea that people can find redemption, that we are invested in the idea that our history is not a pointer to our future, and that each person in our community has the right to be judged on their potential, not on their past.

Respectively,

Printed Name:

Address:

Email: