



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Written Testimony – HB 906 – Occupational Licensing and Certification – Criminal
History – Prohibited Disclosure and Predetermination Review Process**

February 21, 2023

Good afternoon, Mr. Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the Committee. For the record, I am Delegate Andrea Fletcher Harrison here today in support of HB 906.

I'm bringing forth this piece of legislation as a fresh start for citizens who happen to be formerly incarcerated. It's important to me that people have second chances to help businesses, encourage successful re-entry, help support Maryland families, and aid public safety.

As written in the bill, HB906 would modify the laws surrounding the rejection of applicants with criminal histories from getting occupational licenses or certificates. It would prohibit agencies from requiring applicants to disclose certain information and ensure an honest and fair review of a person's criminal history. HB 906 calls for agencies to individualize consideration without passing prejudgment simply due to a record.

This bill is crucial because there are many benefits to implementing HB 906. For starters, it would allow ex-offenders who are rehabilitated a new beginning. By removing a barrier from the licensing process, more non-violent ex-offenders will have job opportunities opened for them. This allows more economic growth while showing that Maryland believes in its citizens, regardless of their criminal history.

Removing this barrier would also support the already rocky re-entry back into society. After being released from jail, no matter the time, people struggle to adapt, especially when finding a job. Unfortunately, their new record acts as a stay-away label, no matter their qualifications or years since the offense happened. This prejudice impedes Marylanders from creating successful lives, communities, and families.

To help present more data, I turned to The Prison Policy Initiative, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research group. They have conducted countless studies surrounding mass incarceration, including hiring previously incarcerated people. Their 2018 study shows that ex-offenders are 27 times more likely to be unemployed, which is higher than the unemployment rates during the great depression. This is especially true among marginalized groups and doesn't promote an equitable workforce. Their study showed that non-violent ex-offenders are willing to work. However, they struggle with getting a job for up to three years after their release, the most crucial years for successful re-entry. After years of struggle, the recidivism rate increases,

stunting rehabilitation progress and disrupting public safety. With HB 906, we can unlock the 19 percent of Maryland jobs that require licensing and certificates while increasing public safety and encouraging reintegration.

In addition, the White House enacted the Fair Chance Business Pledge in 2014, and in 2017 New York was the first state to pass something similar called The Work for Success Employer Pledge. Both pledges encouraged employers to hire non-violent ex-offenders, with over 300 companies and universities signing the White House pledge and 14 thousand businesses signing the New York pledge. This coincides with the Society for Human Resource Management study that shows CEOs, managers, and workers are willing to hire and work alongside ex-offenders. If the general public is open to working with non-violent ex-offenders, so should licensing and certificate agencies. Utilizing the plethora of skills several formerly incarcerated people had before prison, learned in prison, or after should be the focus. This is especially true when their prior offenses do not hinder their ability to work or don't affect the safety of the people around them.

Everyone has a past, and it's our responsibility as lawmakers to show that the past doesn't define anyone. Change and progress are always possible; together, we can keep improving the quality of formerly incarcerated people in Maryland and the families, communities, and businesses affected by the structural barriers presented by licensing.

With that, I will turn it over to the rest of our panel, which will further explain why this is an important issue. Thank you for your time, and I urge a favorable report on HB 906.