Vermont Business Group Praises Signing of Ban the Box Bill

New law gives Vermonters with criminal histories a “second chance” at getting a good job.

Montpelier, VT (May 3, 2016) – A new employment bill signed into law by Gov. Shumlin on Tuesday will help Vermonters with criminal histories rebuild their lives by eliminating a common barrier to employment, according to Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility.

The “Ban the Box” bill removes the criminal history question from most private sector job applications in Vermont while also retaining an employer’s right to conduct background checks and to ask about convictions during job interviews. VBSR believes this bill matches modern hiring processes and allows Vermonters with criminal convictions the opportunity to tell their story in an interview and explain to a prospective employer what skills and qualifications they bring to a position.

Passing a Ban the Box bill was one of VBSR’s top priorities for the 2016 legislative session.

“If a person is convicted of a crime and pays their debt to society, VBSR believes they deserve a second chance,” said Daniel Barlow, the public policy manager at Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility. “More and more employers across the state have already banned the box – recognizing that it wrongly limits their own pool of applicants. Signing the bill into law and expanding this practice to private employers across the state is not only the right thing to do, but it also makes economic sense for Vermont.”

The proposal received tri-partisan support in the Vermont House and Senate this year, the product of strong work by the House General, Housing, and Military Affairs Committee and the Senate Economic Development, Housing, and General Affairs Committee. Rep. Jean O’Sullivan of Burlington was the lead sponsor of the bill and an important advocate for reform. Gov. Shumlin has also been a supporter of the proposal and last year signed an executive order banning the box for state jobs.

Many VBSR members were instrumental in supporting the Ban the Box bill, including Russ Bennett, the owner of Northland Design and Construction; Chris Miller, the activism manager at Ben & Jerry’s Ice Cream; Heather Wright, an attorney with WrightJones PLC; and Mickey Wiles, the chief financial officer at Burlington Labs.

“This Ban the Box law provides an opportunity for individuals to get in the door, allowing the employer to learn about a prospective hire rather than pass judgment based on a paper application,” Wiles said. “The judgment on whether to hire someone should be based more on what they have done after their crime and punishment to ensure they are taking responsibility and are accountable for their actions. In most cases, if a person has pursued the appropriate corrective action, then they will make excellent employees.”
Founded in 1990, VBSR is a statewide, non-profit business association with a mission to advance business ethics that value multiple bottom lines: economic, social, and environmental. Through education, public influence, and workplace quality, VBSR strives to help 760+ members set a high standard for protecting the natural, human, and economic environments of the state's residents, while remaining profitable. Learn more or join the cause at www.vbsr.org.

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