

Testimony in Support of H.261

April 1, 2016



To: Senate Committee on Economic Development
Provided by: Ashley Moore, Business Outreach Manager, Main Street Alliance of Vermont

The Main Street Alliance supports H.261. We believe that this bill is a step toward ensuring that all people, regardless of criminal history, have equal access to employment opportunities.

This bill does not prevent employers from asking about an applicant's criminal history, but simply requires that the employer waits until after the initial application has been reviewed. This prevents an automatic ruling out of the applicant in response to the stigma that surrounds those with criminal records. It also gives the applicant an opportunity to explain his/her crime, how long ago it was committed, and how it does or does not relate to his/her ability to meet the requirements of the job.

This policy is also an important step toward preventing hiring discrimination of communities of color. Data show that, in 2008, Hispanics and African Americans comprised 58% of all prisoners, even though these groups make up only one quarter of the US population. Allowing applications to include this box inherently has a disproportionate impact on communities of color.

Main Street Alliance believes that a previous criminal conviction should not create a lifelong barrier to re-employment. Allowing everyone equal access to employment opportunities will improve the quality of life for Vermonters with criminal records and support a thriving state.

“At the age of seventeen, I was convicted of a crime and spent some time in jail. After being released, I had a difficult time finding a job and couldn't even get past the initial application to get an interview. If we can begin to remove some of the barriers to reemployment, such as conviction disclosure boxes on applications, we will be taking a step forward in alleviating some of the discrimination that exists for individuals with criminal history and ensuring that everyone has a fair chance at employment.”

Jason Aprea, Co-Owner of BBetter Inc. in Brattleboro

“This bill would open more doors for people working to rebuild their lives after being released from corrections and would prevent more roadblocks to the new future that they are attempting to build.” **Matt Birong, Owner of 3 Squares Café in Vergennes**

“Once a sentence has been served there is no need to create a 'life sentence' that prevents future growth and opportunity. I believe that in order to create a strong, vibrant, and healthy Vermont community, it is necessary to create a path to success for this population to again contribute to our economy and rebuild their lives in a healthy and constructive way.” **Sue Bette, Owner of Bluebird Barbecue in Burlington**

“The fact remains that often these applications are screened out without thought going into what the crime was or how long ago it was committed, without first learning the circumstances, without making other inquiries into the qualities the person possesses, without considering what they've done to make amends and change their life, and without considering if there is any relevance in relation to the duties of the job.”
- **Angela Earle-Gray, Director of Human Resources at Chroma Technology in Bellows Falls**