

Ban the Box Proposal

The Metro Human Relations Commission --whose mission is to protect and promote the personal dignity, peace, safety, security, health, and general welfare of all people in Nashville and Davidson County—strongly supports the Fair Chance Hiring Policy, also known as the Ban the Box Proposal.

The benefits of this simple act of removing conviction information from Metro employment applications extend to job applicants, employers, and the city of Nashville alike. Formerly incarcerated individuals, like their fellow residents of Davidson County, deserve the chance to seek employment without intimidation or discrimination. The presence of this question (“Have you ever been convicted of a criminal offense other than traffic violations?”) at the very start of an application process may discourage qualified job candidates from even applying. For those with criminal convictions, this is one of the biggest obstacles to civic reintegration. In fact, recidivism is strongly linked to unemployment, as those without a job are three times more likely to return to prison than their employed counterparts.

Without conviction status to shadow the evaluation of a potential hire, employers within Metro government may better assess job candidates based primarily on skill, experience, and fit for the position. This policy does not prevent employers from ever asking potential hires about their conviction status but instead removes the question from the initial job application. As such, it allows for a more comprehensive assessment of all job applicants, regardless of prior criminal offenses, and increases the possibility that qualified candidates will be seriously considered for employment. It also permits people with convictions the opportunity to explain their record, if they so desire.

The city of Nashville benefits when all residents prosper. The incarceration rate in Nashville alone grew substantially in the past 20 years and many of those with criminal convictions struggle to reintegrate into civic life. A substantial proportion of our homeless population cannot find gainful employment as a result of discrimination against those with a criminal conviction. The economic development of the city depends greatly on the opportunities that can be afforded to those that live below the poverty line (more than a fifth of our population in 2012).

As part of the IncluCivics project, the Metro Human Relations Commission finds that racial and ethnic minorities are highly underrepresented within Metro departments. As people of color are incarcerated at disproportionate levels, fair chance hiring may correct some of the racial inequities that exist even within city government. The Metro workforce should adequately reflect the diversity of the broader community and we believe this ban will help in this effort toward inclusivity.

Individuals living and working in Davidson county are entitled to a fair and equitable process of hiring that allows every one the chance for economic prosperity and self-sufficiency. Continuing its tradition of progressive trailblazing, Nashville can join more than 100 cities across the U.S. in becoming a model for employment equality and economic mobility by implementing the proposed Fair Chance Hiring Policy. The Metro Human Relations Commission joins local congregations, community organizations, and private employers in supporting fair chance hiring in Metro government.