

Reducing Barriers to Employment for Returning Citizens through Occupational Licensing Reform

The problem:

One of the strongest deterrents of re-offense is the opportunity for gainful work after incarceration. However, Floridians with past criminal convictions face several roadblocks when pursuing occupational licenses, such as required training hours and associated costs, disqualifying periods, and “good moral character” criteria used by licensing boards as basis for denying applications. These policies have hindered returning citizens from gaining access to dozens of occupations — threatening their ability to successfully integrate in their communities and increasing their likelihood to re-offend.

How HB 953, “Criminal History in Professional Licensing Applications,” addresses the problem:

- Shortens the period of time from five to two years for when past criminal convictions cannot be the sole ground to deny licenses for certain types of occupations.
- Removes “good moral character” as a disqualifying criterion for certain types of occupational licenses.
- Creates a pipeline program that allows applicable licensing boards to approve the credits applicants received from the Department of Corrections’ educational programs to be counted towards licensing training requirements.

Why now is the time to pass HB 953:

- **It would be fiscally beneficial for the state.** Five in 10 people who were released in 2016 ended up getting re-arrested within two years of release. Gainful employment would reduce that number and help save taxpayer dollars.
- **It would help spur economic growth.** Boosting workforce opportunities for returning citizens as Florida recovers from the COVID-19 crisis would reduce unemployment rate and generate more revenue from sales tax dollars.
- **There is national consensus that reform is imperative.** Several other states have already taken action. Fifteen states (including Mississippi and West Virginia) generally prevent licensing boards from using “good moral character” or other vague standards to deny licenses to returning citizens.

For more info:

Contact Tachana Joseph-Marc, policy analyst at Florida Policy Institute, marc@floridapolicy.org
Visit www.floridapolicy.org/initiatives/occupational-licensing