

The Oklahoma Legislature  
2300 N. Lincoln Blvd  
Oklahoma City, OK 73105

March 16, 2022

Honorable Members of the Oklahoma Legislature,

As followers of Christ, we believe that our laws should honor the God-given dignity of people with a criminal record and their ability to become fully engaged members of their communities. Guided by these values, lawmakers should seek to remove any unnecessary, overbearing government-imposed barriers to gainful employment. We request your support for SB 1691 to safely ensure more Oklahomans who have served their time can experience the dignity of work.

Access to a stable career path helps men and women to provide for their families, serve their communities, and maintain honorable work. Such opportunities should be extended to Oklahomans who have served their time and seek to build a new life. When an individual can find employment after serving their time, it significantly reduces the chances that they will return to crime and incarceration.<sup>1</sup>

We acknowledge consideration of safety risk in the workplace is a primary purpose of government licensing agencies. However, automatic or unfair denials based solely on the existence of a criminal record are not well tailored to that goal and can sideline otherwise eligible workers.<sup>2</sup> Where occupational licensing decisions are based on clearly articulated safety risk and mindful of rehabilitative progress made, more opportunities for success can be unlocked for people with a criminal record to live out their callings as parents, workers, and neighbors.

In 2019, Oklahoma took substantial steps toward better aligning occupational licensing restrictions in this area by requiring any disqualifying criminal offense to be substantially related to the duties of the occupation and pose a reasonable threat to public safety.<sup>3</sup> SB 1691 would build on that work, creating a system of focused individualized review that will open more doors for licensed employment while still permitting decision makers the discretion to issue denials based on public safety risk. In addition, SB1691 would provide due process protections for applicants, limit board consideration of certain records, and create data collection requirements that will provide insight into progress made toward safe and successful employment over time.

Through access to meaningful work, men and women with a criminal record can live up to their God-given potential. SB1691 is the next step in this effort and is in line with reforms passed recently in Texas, Arizona, Michigan, and Ohio.<sup>4</sup> We ask that you support and pass this legislation.

Respectfully,

Heather Rice-Minus  
Senior Vice President of Advocacy and Church Mobilization  
Prison Fellowship  
[undersigned]

Brett Farley  
Executive Director  
Catholic Conference of Oklahoma  
[undersigned]

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<sup>1</sup> Mark T. Berg & Beth M. Huebner, *Reentry and the Ties that Bind: An Examination of Social Ties, Employment, and Recidivism*, Justice Quarterly (April 2011) <https://www.pacific-gateway.org/reentry,%20employment%20and%20recidivism.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Nick Sibilla, *Barred from Working: A Nationwide Study of Occupational Licensing Barriers for Ex-Offender*, Institute for Justice (Aug. 2020), <https://ij.org/report/barred-from-working/>.

<sup>3</sup> 59 Okla. St. § 4000.1.

<sup>4</sup> *State Occupational Licensing Reforms for Workers with Criminal Records*, Institute for Justice, <https://ij.org/legislative-advocacy/state-occupational-licensing-reforms-for-people-with-criminal-records/>.