



Giving Ex-Offenders a Fresh Start When Looking for a Job: Part Two

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As researchers at the Show-Me Institute have pointed out [before](#) , occupational licensing can be burdensome for workers and consumers in Missouri without necessarily improving public health or safety. There is another area, however, where occupational licensing may do more harm than good: ex-offenders looking for jobs. People may think blanket bans on ex-offenders applying for licenses is good for public safety, but [research](#) has shown it can be counter-productive.

Currently, Missouri requires licenses for 240 occupations, [37 of which are for low- to moderate-income jobs](#) . Many licensing boards list “good character” or not having committed “any offense involving moral turpitude” as a requirement for applicants or renewal of licenses. While it may make sense to prohibit some ex-offenders from obtaining a license, these vague statements shut out almost anyone with a criminal record regardless of the nature of their offense, the time that has lapsed since they served their time, or if they have successfully completed rehabilitation. It also precludes an employer from exercising its discretion in determining a person’s fitness for a position.

On one hand, it seems wise to refuse licenses in certain cases—say someone with a history of substance abuse or drug dealing applying for a pharmacy technician license. On the other hand, blanket bans of ex-offenders create obstacles to getting jobs that may have no connection with the crime committed and make it more likely that the offender will eventually return to prison. Other states—including Arizona, Indiana, Minnesota, and Tennessee—have shown there is a

better way forward that strikes the balance between safety and second chances.

Instead of allowing licensing boards to have wholesale bans on those with criminal records, [Fresh Start Legislation](#) would require that boards list specific crimes that are directly related to the occupation in question and consider factors such as time passed since the last conviction and the nature of the offense. .

Under Fresh Start laws, boards may only outright deny applicants if they have a conviction within the last five years or if the conviction was for a violent or sexual crime. This means more dangerous criminals and repeat offenders would still be able to be screened out. But if someone has an older conviction for a nonviolent crime and has remained crime free since being released, their application must be considered and they are allowed to appeal the decision if denied.

Missouri's Governor recently mentioned the need for better prisoner education so prisoners can be released ready to enter the workforce. But how much can educational programs accomplish if ex-offenders are being automatically shut out of hundreds of occupations? By removing unnecessary obstacles to ex-offenders leaving prison, a Fresh Start law would be a good first step to help these people get jobs and fully reintegrate into their communities.

About the Author



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[2] <https://showmeinstitute.org/blog/individual-liberty-miscellaneous/license-reciprocity-proposal-would-be-major-reform>

[3] <https://research.wpcarey.asu.edu/economic-liberty/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/CSEL-Policy-Report-2016-01-Turning-Shackles-into-Bootstraps.pdf>

[4] https://ij.org/wp-content/themes/ijorg/images/ltw2/License_to_Work_2nd_Edition.pdf

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