

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 43

BY SENATOR MIZELL

A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

To recognize April 2021 as Second Chance Month and honor the work of communities, governmental institutions, nonprofits, congregations, employers, and individuals to remove unnecessary legal and societal barriers that prevent individuals with a criminal record from becoming productive members of society.

WHEREAS, every person is endowed with human dignity and value; and

WHEREAS, redemption and second chances are American values; and

WHEREAS, an estimated seventy million American citizens have a criminal record;

and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Department of Justice reports that more than six hundred thousand individuals returned to their community from state and federal prisons in 2019, including more than sixteen thousand from Louisiana; and

WHEREAS, individuals who have paid their debt after committing a crime face significant barriers, also known as collateral consequences, to reintegrating into society; and

WHEREAS, the Council of State Governments reports that the number of legal collateral consequences of a criminal conviction exceeds forty-four thousand, including thirteen thousand and three hundred and forty consequences unique to Louisiana; and

WHEREAS, America's youth face more than one thousand collateral consequences affecting their high school and higher education; and

WHEREAS, many of these consequences are mandatory, without taking into account the seriousness of the offense, the time passed since the offense, the individual's efforts to make amends and earn back the public's trust, or whether the consequence has a proven

public safety benefit; and

WHEREAS, gaining meaningful employment is one of the most significant predictors of successful reentry and reducing future criminal activity; and

WHEREAS, ninety percent of those who have previously been incarcerated struggle to find employment because of both societal and legal barriers, which are often not directly related to the offense committed or any proven public safety benefit; and

WHEREAS, every jurisdiction has laws that prohibit individuals with a criminal record from working in certain industries, such as cosmetology, operation of arcade games, automotive parts recycling, camping equipment sales, boiler inspection, and many others; and

WHEREAS, over sixty percent of employers report they would not be willing to hire someone with any criminal record and many employers utilize a blanket no-hire policy for individuals with a criminal record; and

WHEREAS, education has also been shown to be a significant predictor of successful reentry; and

WHEREAS, those with a criminal record have lower levels of educational attainment than the general population and have significant difficulty acquiring admission to and funding for educational programs; and

WHEREAS, individuals convicted of certain crimes are barred from receiving the financial aid necessary to acquire additional skills and knowledge; and

WHEREAS, many individuals, regardless of their efforts to live positively, are denied admission to institutions of higher education on account of their criminal record despite a lack of empirical evidence showing a campus safety risk; and

WHEREAS, people with a criminal history also face significant barriers in securing a place to live; and

WHEREAS, fifty-six percent of landlords are unwilling to rent to an individual with a criminal record containing a felony charge and thirty-two percent are unwilling to rent to an individual with a previous misdemeanor conviction; and

WHEREAS, individuals with a criminal history are also barred from seeking access to public housing or receiving public housing assistance; and

WHEREAS, this inability to access housing has been found to increase the number of individuals returning to prison; and

WHEREAS, many people with a criminal history also face other significant challenges such as significant debts as a result of their conviction and incarceration, the inability to make amends by volunteering, as well as difficulty in securing identification documentation; and

WHEREAS, all of these barriers prevent the seventy million Americans with criminal records from contributing fully to their families and communities; and

WHEREAS, these barriers can contribute to recidivism, which increases victimization and decreases public safety; and

WHEREAS, the inability to find gainful employment and other collateral consequences of conviction inhibit the economic mobility of people with a criminal history, which negatively impacts the well-being of their children and families for generations; and

WHEREAS, the legal barriers and stigma associated with a criminal record results in lost human capital and lost economic output for the United States; and

WHEREAS, the anniversary of the federal Second Chance Act of 2007, which has provided reentry services to more than one hundred and sixty-four thousand people in forty-nine states and the District of Columbia since the anniversary of the law's passage, falls on April 9th; and

WHEREAS, the anniversary of the death of Charles Colson, who used his second chance following his incarceration for a Watergate-related crime to found Prison Fellowship, the nation's largest outreach to prisoners and their families, falls on April 21, 2021; and

WHEREAS, a robust coalition of businesses, congregations, and other organizations across the country has celebrated Second Chance Month since April 2017 through events, Second Chance 5Ks, briefings, social media campaigns, advocacy, press, and other activities; and

WHEREAS, the designation of April 2021 as Second Chance Month can contribute to increased public awareness about the challenges faced by those who have paid their debt to society as well as opportunities for individuals, employers, congregations, and communities to extend second chances.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby recognize April 2021 as Second Chance Month and honors the work of communities, governmental institutions, nonprofits, congregations, employers, and individuals to remove unnecessary legal and societal barriers that prevent individuals with a criminal record from becoming productive members of society.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be transmitted to Prison Fellowship.

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PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE

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SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES