

City of New Haven
Journal of the Board of Aldermen
Human Services Committee

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Tuesday, February 3, 2009

5:30 PM

Aldermanic Chambers

ALDERMANIC NOTICE - NEW HAVEN

The Human Services Committee of the New Haven Board of Aldermen will hold a public hearing at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 3, 2009 in the Aldermanic Chamber of City Hall, 165 Church St., re:

AN ORDINANCE AMENDMENT OF THE NEW HAVEN BOARD OF ALDERMEN PROHIBITING UNFAIR DISCRIMINATION IN CITY HIRING POLICIES AGAINST PERSONS PREVIOUSLY CONVICTED AND PROVIDING A MECHANISM TO ENSURE THAT PERSONS AND BUSINESSES SUPPLYING GOODS AND/OR SERVICES TO THE CITY OF NEW HAVEN HAVE ADOPTED AND EMPLOY FAIR HIRING POLICIES AND PRACTICES THAT ARE CONSISTENT WITH THE CITY'S GOAL OF REMOVING OBSTACLES TO THE EMPLOYMENT OF PERSONS WITH PRIOR CONVICTIONS.

This item is on file and available for public inspection in the Office of the City Clerk, Room 202, 200 Orange Street, New Haven. Per order: Charles A. Blango, Chairman; Attest: Ronald Smith, City Clerk.

For a disability-related accommodation, please call 946-8122 (V) or 946-8582 (TTY) at least three business days prior to the meeting.

Meeting Minutes

Minutes

**Human Services Committee
February 3, 2009**

Chairman Charles A. Blango called the meeting to order at 5:47 p.m. in the Aldermanic Chamber. Present were Aids. S. Rodriguez, Smart, Jones, Plattus, and Brison. Also present was non-member Aid. Goldfield.

First and only heard was an ordinance amendment from the Community Services Administrator and Alderpersons Calder, James, Clark, J. Rodriguez, Blango, Jones, Morehead, Goldfield and Edmonds-Sepulveda prohibiting unfair discrimination in city hiring policies against persons previously convicted and providing a mechanism to ensure that persons and businesses supplying goods and/or services to the City of New Haven have adopted and employ fair hiring policies and practices that are consistent with the city's goal of removing obstacles to the employment of persons with prior convictions.

Appearing on behalf were Kica Matos, Community Services Administrator, and her aide Deborah Marcuse, a Liman fellow from Yale. Matos gave statistics about the number of inmates released into New Haven (25 per week) along with their unmet social services needs. Without intervention, about 39 percent will return to crime. Reducing this recidivism benefits the community at large by providing a safer city with less crime.

Matos discussed some sections of the ordinance amendment, including provisions for evaluating crimes committed by applicants and whether they pertain to the position.

Matos said the amendment also pertains to city vendors, who will have to certify that their hiring process is similar to New Haven's or seek a waiver. New Haven will be the third municipality in the nation with this policy.

Matos said the amendment codifies [at the local level] provisions of Title 7 of the federal civil rights law, which prohibits discrimination.

Marcuse said since the ordinance is so similar to what federal law requires that the real effect of the ordinance is to clarify for applicants and employers what the law is. Using a conviction record in employment criteria has a disparate effect on minorities. The felon box on job applications helps employers maintain racist practices. This ordinance will level the playing field for all job applicants.

The chair asked where the city purchasing agent fits into the process if the Corporation Counsel and Community Services agency screen vendors and grant waivers. Michael Fumiatti, Purchasing Agent, came to the table and said his office will require vendors to sign a waiver that they are in compliance with the policy. Matos said any exemptions granted would meet criteria similar to civil rights act waivers. The vendors would have to complete lengthy and detailed applications for waivers. In response to a question of whether it is legal or appropriate to

dictate these conditions to employers, Marcuse said the ordinance has been screened by corporation counsel, who has no concerns. She said it only requires employers to comply with the existing non-discrimination laws.

Ald. Goldfield said he is concerned that the review process for convicted persons who have received a city job offer could lead to lawsuits. Matos said Boston has had no such problems. Marcuse noted that the National Employment Law project backs the proposal.

PUBLIC COMMENT - ALL SPEAKERS IN FAVOR

James Bhandary-Alexander, 72 Alden Avenue and attorney for New Haven Legal Assistance. He read from prepared testimony. He said employment is one of the biggest challenges for ex-offenders. He said the city has the right to impose the restrictions on vendors and that the ordinance may actually decrease employment lawsuits against the city.

Tirzah Kemp, 200 Goffe St., said the amendment will help level playing field for persons convicted of crimes.

Nick Handler, 65 Edgewood Ave. He said he worked on a similar program at a law center in New York and does not believe it will lead to employment law suits here.

Barbara Fair, 161 W. Spring St., West Haven. She said she was charged with a felony but pleaded to a misdemeanor a number of years ago. This tainted her employment prospects. She eventually sought and received a pardon and went on to get a college degree. A criminal conviction creates a false barrier to employment. Credit checks are another barrier.

Marisol Nunez, 762 George St. She said she made the mistake of getting a felony conviction when younger.

Pamela Allen, 762 George St. She said she served time in prison and now runs a program that assists ex-offenders. She read from a prepared statement that is in the meeting file.

Joseph Burgeson, 65 Miller St. He said he is an ex-offender who has been rejected for employment on the basis of his criminal record.

Derike Anderson, 258 Winthrop Ave. He said he was here to reiterate the points made by previous speakers. He was recently released from prison and has found it difficult to find employment.

Pete DeShane, 256 Winthrop Avenue. It would create optimism for offenders and reduce recidivism.

Douglas Draftin, 762 George St. He said he is in recovery, and the box is a downfall for him.

Billy Wright, 762 George St. He said he is in Ms. Allen's program like a number of the previous speakers.

Blaine Bastic, no address given. He said he is a project manager for the Male Involvement Network program.

Whitney Murphy, no address given. He said removing the box would reduce recidivism.

George Cunningham, 80 Read St. He said he is an ex-offender who is now a contractor who hires ex-offenders. He feels the box was put there for the wrong reason and should be removed. He is in favor of vocational training programs in prison.

Richard Minifield, 48 Howe Street. He said he is an ex offender who got an associate's degree in prison and culinary training. He has been able to get jobs but the box makes him feel hopeless.

Carolyn Stewart, 762 George St. She said she is an ex-offender and resident of the Evergreen sober house. She has felt hurt by the box when applying for jobs.

Tyrone Weston, no address given. He said he is one of the workers in the city's the Street Outreach Worker program. He served 10 years and eight months in prison. The box is a challenge for his youthful clients.

(Name inaudible.) He said he served time in prison. He has trouble getting a job. He wants very much to work.

Ald. Jones went around the table to testify. She is a co-sponsor of this legislation. She has felt the difficulties of the box faced by many family members. She is proud to be a sponsor, proud to be part of a city that will stand up and ask more of the vendors. She wants to assist ex-offenders who now want to work and mend their families. There needs to be more hope for youth who make mistakes - because the lack of hope causes them to make more mistakes. She urged the committee to support the legislation.

COMMITTEE ACTION:

On a motion by Ald. S. Rodriguez, seconded by Ald. Smart, the committee voted by voice to issue a favorable report.

Adjourn: 8:07 p.m.

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Office of Legislative Services.

Respectfully Submitted,

Michael Mercier
Legislative Aide