Resolution to Ban the Box on Employment Applications in the Diocese of Alabama

Be it resolved that the Diocese of Alabama affirms that in our Baptismal Covenant we commit ourselves to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves and that the Church’s mission is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ and it pursues its mission by promoting justice, peace and love.

Be it further resolved that Scripture teaches us that in God’s kingdom, forgiveness is always available and affording negative differential treatment to an individual goes against a key tenet of our faith, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

Be it further resolved that the employment applications of our congregations and institutions which include the check box asking if the applicant has a conviction/arrest record, can perpetuate punishment for applicants who have already paid their debt to society and can lead to pre-judgment, stereotyping and bias during the application process. Often the application is immediately discarded.

Be it therefore resolved that the Diocese of Alabama encourages all parishes and institutions to Ban the Box on employment applications concerning conviction/arrest history thereby removing the barrier to creating new life in community, and allowing applicants to be interviewed on the merits of skills and qualifications. Conviction/arrest history can then be disclosed by the applicant, along with efforts for rehabilitation and mitigating information and revealed during the due diligence of a background check.

Submitted by the Parish and Vestry of St. Mark’s, Birmingham

Background:

The “criminal history checkbox” on many standardized job application forms often keeps otherwise qualified employees from making it to the next stage of the hiring process, where they could explain their past face-to-face. This creates discouraging barriers to employment for people who are looking to rebuild their lives after serving their time and paying their debt to society.

A nationwide “Ban the Box” movement is urging some simple but important changes to job application processes. Removing questions about conviction histories can level the playing field and give all applicants a fair chance to compete for jobs on the basis of qualifications and skills. The movement already has influenced many Alabama employers to make individualized assessments of applicants, delaying questions about criminal offenses until later in the hiring process, and considering how long ago the offense was committed, whether it is relevant to the job and what steps the applicant has taken towards rehabilitation.

Many major corporations already recognize that it makes good business sense to pick from the widest possible pool of employees. Target, Walmart, Home Depot, Koch Industries, Starbucks, and Bed, Bath & Beyond no longer ask questions about criminal history on initial job applications.

How individuals with criminal history can re-enter the workforce and the broader society is an issue with both moral and economic dimensions. People who have completed their punishment deserve both dignity and forgiveness. Affected individuals need to be brought back into the mainstream, rewarded for their labor and encouraged to play by the rules. Creating a group of people deemed permanently unemployable because of a past criminal conviction is bad public policy and bad economics. 1

1 Arise Citizens’ Policy Project, www.arisecitizens.org