

“Second Chances Commendable”

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To the Editor:

In your newspaper's recent article, "1,800 Felons on N.J. Public Payrolls" (4/1/07), the authors accurately state that in New Jersey "it's not a crime to be a public employee with a criminal record," yet imply that the state may be acting irresponsibly by employing such individuals.

To the contrary, the state should be applauded for its commitment to giving individuals a second chance after they have paid their debt to society. While jobs that entail working with vulnerable populations such as children certainly warrant thorough background checks and public safety protocol, by providing a fair shake to those who seek to lead productive (taxpaying) lives the state not only appropriately levels the playing field but also models sound policy for the private sector. Such forward-minded thinking has fueled a growing movement of cities across the country that have passed 'ban the box' ordinances to remove the criminal record 'box' from first-stage job applications. These measures, adopted in Boston, Chicago, Minneapolis, San Francisco, St. Paul, and elsewhere, send a clear message: when a criminal record has no meaningful relation to the job at hand, it is unlawful to use this past history as grounds for discrimination.

Fairness considerations aside, enlightened self-interest and plain common sense dictate that gainfully employed neighbors and family members enhance the quality of life for us all. Government policies that promote such mutual gain should be celebrated not doubted.

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