



PRESS RELEASE

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Rhode Island Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Releases Report:

Licensing Barriers to Employment Post-Conviction in Rhode Island

The Rhode Island Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights has released a report: "[Licensing Barriers to Employment Post-Conviction in Rhode Island](#)." The Committee heard testimony that people of color are overrepresented in Rhode Island's criminal justice system, and their conviction histories prevent them from obtaining occupational licenses that allow them to meaningfully re-enter society. The Committee highlighted the following key findings in their report:

- Formerly incarcerated people pursue education towards a career but find that a conviction history prevents them from obtaining a license in that career field.
- There is a lack of uniform occupational licensing standards and demographic data available.
- Licensing regulations are governed by individual agencies or entities; licensing boards do not receive consistent guidance around how to consider a conviction if an applicant has a conviction history; and there is a lack of data available regarding why applicants are denied a license.
- There are economic costs to society when formerly incarcerated people are prevented from accessing employment opportunities, and unemployment is a cause of recidivism.

Rhode Island's new legislation, the "Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action – Licensing Act," also commonly known as the "Fair Chance Licensing Bill," supports data collection efforts, including demographic reporting requirements, that may help illuminate racial bias in the future. The report includes recommendations directed to the Commission that highlight a need to ensure the Fair Chance Licensing Bill is implemented as advocates intended, with a focus on reporting demographic data and protecting against licensing denials based on subjective assessments of good moral character.

Committee Chair Margaux Morisseau said, "The subjective nature of occupational licensing application denials for those with criminal convictions is concerning, particularly when we know that there is a disproportionate number of people of color with conviction histories in Rhode Island. The current lack of demographic data in licensing denials prevents real efforts to combat the potentially disparate impact on people of color. We are encouraged by the recent passage of Rhode Island's Fair Chance Licensing Bill, which seeks to reform many of the issues that prevent those with conviction histories from accessing employment, and hope our report generates additional attention to this issue of critical importance for Rhode Islanders seeking employment post-conviction.

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The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, established by the Civil Rights Act of 1957, is the only independent, bipartisan agency charged with advising the President and Congress on civil rights and reporting annually on federal civil rights enforcement. Our 51 state Advisory Committees offer a broad perspective on civil rights concerns at state and local levels. The Commission: in our 7th decade, a continuing legacy of influence in civil rights. For information about the Commission, please visit www.usccr.gov and follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).