



801 W. Riverside | Suite 100 | Spokane WA 99201

Phone: 509.624.1393 | 800.SPOKANE

Fax: 509.747.0077

GreaterSpokane.org

November 22, 2017

RE: Fair Chance Hiring Ordinance

Council President Stuckart & Council Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to work with you, your staff, and various stakeholders associated with the Fair Chance Hiring ordinance. We appreciate you engaging the business community as you developed the content of this ordinance.

Support for the goal

We share your desire to remove barriers to employment for those re-entering the community after incarceration. As a business development organization, we help ensure employers have access to a skilled and qualified workforce. Getting those who've done their time back into the workforce reduces recidivism and the strain on other government resources.

GSI has demonstrated our commitment to this issue:

- We worked with Associated Industries to develop a model job application without a question about criminal history, which can be found on our website.
- We've led several well-attended forums on this issue including a public meeting with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and multiple presentations for GSI's Public Policy Council, Executive Committee and 66-member Board of Trustees.
- I personally served as a panelist at the Council's Fair Chance Hiring forum in March 2016.
- GSI staff participated in additional Fair Chance Hiring forums at the Gathering House in January 2017 and Community Building in 2017.
- GSI staff also met with Center for Justice staff and I Did The Time members numerous times to discuss ban the box and other impediments to employment.

Opportunities for further collaboration

We believe that additional education around this issue could help both the employer and the employee. Possibilities include programs to ensure that job seekers have a resume that truly showcases their talent – making their criminal history a non-issue; and for employers, a program to connect them with the supply of qualified workers that meet their needs, but that happen to have a criminal history.

Similar existing programs have already proven to be incredibly successful. As of this summer, the Head Start to the Construction Trades training program conducted by Inland Northwest Associated General Contractors with Community Development Block Grant dollars administered by the City of Spokane, has already placed 30 formerly incarcerated individuals into good paying construction jobs.

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With programs such as this already proving successful, we encourage the Council to consider expanding such alternatives and exploring new ones. We believe a more targeted, case management approach will be more effective in achieving the actual goal, and will also make it easier to quantify the impact.

With the City of Spokane and Spokane County already removing criminal history as a screening tool in their hiring, there is an opportunity to pilot the effectiveness of this policy locally, at least within public sector hiring. Data specific to Spokane on whether or not such a practice actually results in greater employment for this group would be valuable information to consider before enacting this ordinance.

Impacts on small business

Most businesses in Spokane are small businesses. Unlike cities and counties with large HR departments that handle much of the hiring process, local business hiring is often done by the owner or a manager. Additional time spent interviewing and background checking an employee they don't intend to hire results in a loss of time and productivity. Some small businesses simply can't afford background checks.

What may seem as simply a small change to an application actually requires significant shifts on the part of businesses in their hiring procedures and practices. A separate set of compliance measures will need to be developed for employers with locations both within the city limits and in other jurisdictions.

Conclusion

GSI's Board of Trustees voted on November 20th to not take a position on this specific ordinance – but rather to affirm that if such matters are going to be addressed through legislative action, they should be done so at the state level to provide greater consistency and certainty for businesses already facing increased regulation, a higher minimum wage and other challenges.

As stated earlier, we support and agree with the goal of this ordinance. We also believe there are better alternatives that still exist. Outcomes such as the sample job application were steps in the right direction. Should the Council wish to work towards additional alternatives to an ordinance, we welcome the opportunity to partner with you.

Thank you again for the opportunity to bring the business voice to this discussion and process.

Sincerely,



Todd Mielke, CEO

Greater Spokane Incorporated

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509.321.3635

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