



NEWS RELEASE

LOUISIANA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Louisiana Becomes the First State to Ban the Box on Public College Applications *House Bill 688 Granted Final Passage and headed to Gov. John Bel Edwards*

Louisiana: House Bill 688, which prohibits public colleges from asking questions about criminal history (except sexual assault) in admissions, received final passage in the House of Representatives Monday, June 5th. Currently 40% of public colleges in Louisiana ask students about felony convictions on their admissions applications. A recent study by College and Community Fellowships found that 2 out of 3 people that select yes to the criminal history question do not finish the college application. This bill will encourage more people with convictions to finish the application process and access higher education opportunities.

“Nine years ago, I was denied entrance into a public postsecondary institution because of my criminal history. While there is still work to be done, this bill is a necessary first step to ensuring that people with convictions are able to access higher education,” said Syrita Steib, executive director of Operation Restoration, an organization based in New Orleans committed to supporting reentry for women and girls.

HB688 was filed by Rep. Vincent Pierre (Lafayette) after hearing Syrita Steib speak about her personal challenges in pursuing a college degree. As this bill moved through the legislature, it gained momentum in response to several courageous people sharing parts of their own educational pursuit after a conviction. Several legislators were moved by these testimonies.

Rep. Ted James, co-author of the bill said, “We are working to increase opportunities for all citizens of Louisiana, but especially those who hope to leave mistakes of the past behind them and move forward. Legislation such as this pushes us all toward the reform our state needs.”

Rep. Pierre said, “Passage of this bill is a great win for our state. We should encourage and support our citizens in their efforts to rehabilitate and fulfill their goals. Criminal history should not hinder a person from achieving any academic dream or desire, and with HB 688 in effect we will open doors for those seeking to start anew.”

“About a million people are living with a criminal conviction in Louisiana, some went to prison, most did not, but all of them deserve access to education and the opportunity to live meaningful lives,” says Annie Freitas, program director of the Louisiana Prison Education Coalition (LPEC). The Coalition began when a number of committed organizations and individuals began assessing the specific needs of Louisiana’s forgotten people, who generally struggle alone to navigate their pathways into higher education.

Governor John Bel Edwards is expected to sign the education bill, as he urged the Justice Reinvestment Task Force to reduce the prison population and cut down on the \$700 million budget for punishment. Although not conceived by the Task Force, supporters of HB688 (particularly Operation Restoration, Louisiana Prison Education Coalition, and Voice of the Experienced) gained the interest and support of people throughout the statehouse. A signing ceremony is expected early next week.

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