

Opening Statement  
Chairman Elijah E. Cummings

H.R. 1076, the Fair Chance Act

March 26, 2016

Today the Committee will consider a bill which I am a proud sponsor: H.R. 1076, the Fair Chance Act.

The Fair Chance Act would quote, “**ban the box**” in federal hiring by restricting federal employers and contractors from asking about the criminal histories of applicants until the conditional offer stage.

It will give formerly incarcerated people a fair chance at a job and a piece of the American dream.

On March 13, the Civil Rights and Civil Liberties and Government Operations Subcommittees held a joint hearing on the Fair Chance Act.

During the hearing, we saw that both sides of the aisle are committed to continue to advance criminal justice reform and fair reentry policies that reduce recidivism.

Senator Ron Johnson, Chairman of the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee, spoke about the importance of giving these individuals an opportunity to live a life with dignity and value to their families and communities, and to reduce recidivism.

Senator Cory Booker spoke about the collateral consequences that formerly incarcerated people face.

People of color, specifically African-Americans, feel these consequences more acutely and are given fewer job opportunities than their white counterparts.

Congressman Doug Collins, Ranking Member of the House Judiciary Committee, spoke about how his leadership on the First Step Act has helped advance the cause of criminal justice and how the Fair Chance Act is a natural next step in making sure that the law has lasting effects in our communities.

Holly Harris highlighted the stories of people she encountered in her state and local advocacy efforts and Teresa Hodge bravely shared her own personal story as a formerly incarcerated individual who was blocked from

multiple job opportunities, despite meeting the positions' qualifications.

We have seen the positive impacts of the ban the box policy in 33 states, including in my home state of Maryland.

We have seen the positive impacts in over 150 cities that have done the same.

We have seen how formerly incarcerated employees contribute to their workplaces at large companies like Walmart, Starbucks, Koch Industries, Target, and Facebook, and small businesses alike.

With the encouraging progress being made at the state and local level and in the private sector, the time is

now to have a national conversation and to move towards opening up opportunities for the formerly incarcerated.

I would like to thank my co-leads on the bill, Senators Johnson and Booker, and Congressman Collins, for their tireless effort in advancing this legislation.

This is so important.

The time is right for a national conversation.

It is time for us to act.

I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this bipartisan measure.