Abstract:

It is estimated that 70 million U.S. adults have criminal records, which equates to roughly one in four American adults. Of those incarcerated, more than half a million are released from prison annually. The ability to obtain stable employment is a primary factor in facilitating a successful transition to life after prison. However, studies show that Americans with criminal records face significant barriers to obtaining employment.

One method to reduce employment barriers, such as hiring bias against job applicants with criminal records, involves legally barring employers from inquiring about criminal backgrounds on job applications. This method, commonly referred to as “Ban the Box,” has been implemented among states and municipalities in the public sector, the private sector, or both. Ban the Box policies do not eliminate questions about applicants' criminal backgrounds, but simply delay questions until after job applicants have obtained an interview or a conditional job offer.

Few studies have been conducted to examine the impact of Ban the Box policies on employers and job applicants. This pilot study uses a non-experimental design to examine employers' hiring experiences related to implementation of Ban the Box policies. An online survey of human resource departments in Minnesota, where a statewide Ban the Box law became effective January 1, 2014, was conducted. The goal of the research was to gather data about the type and extent of effects on hiring practices experienced by employers after implementation of Ban the Box policies. Results showed no significant impact on screening time and hiring costs expended by human resource departments after implementation of Ban the Box policies. Future studies are needed to determine changes in number of applicants with criminal backgrounds hired as a result of Ban the Box policies.

Citation: