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FROM THE OFFICE OF STATE REPRESENTATIVE LA SHAWN K. FORD

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Ford's Bipartisan Bill to Authorize "Second Chance" Small Business Loan Program for Ex-Offenders Signed into Law

CHICAGO – Legislation authored by State Rep. La Shawn K. Ford (D-Chicago) to create a loan program to help nonviolent ex-offenders start small businesses was signed into law on Tuesday. Ford's program is structured to capture federal funds available from Congressman Danny K. Davis' landmark federal "Second Chance Act."

"Illinois spends over \$1.3 billion each year to incarcerate violent and nonviolent offenders, which burdens Illinois' taxpayers," Ford said. "In our state, many offenders return to prison after they are released, and studies show the primary reason for this recidivism is a lack of access to gainful employment to provide for themselves and their families. This program will encourage inmates to use their time in prison to reform themselves and then leave prison with hope and courage to better their lives to return as productive citizens in their communities. During our state's current economic crisis, we are faced with many vital cuts in programs, including those for seniors and for education. If we can reduce the money spent on incarceration, we can protect these vital services."

Ford's House Bill 436 creates a small business loan program through the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity to help qualified ex-offenders receive loans to start a small business. Qualified ex-offenders include any person who has served time in an Illinois adult correctional center and who was not convicted of a crime of violence, a Class X felony, or twice convicted of a felony. Eligible applicants must submit a business plan to qualify, and grants will be available to help interested offenders develop a plan.

The loan program would be funded primarily by federal funds to be available in accordance with the "Second Chance Act" signed into law by former President George W. Bush in 2008.

"The goal of our criminal justice system must be to reduce crime and rehabilitate those who have broken the law, and it's obvious that we as a society are not reaching that goal," Ford said. "It's time we take a hard look at closing the revolving door on our prisons, and the only way we are going to do that is by helping ex-offenders turn their lives around."

For more information, please contact Rep. Ford's constituent service office at (773) 378-5902.

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