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FROM THE OFFICE OF STATE REPRESENTATIVE LA SHAWN K. FORD

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Rep. Ford's Bill to Prohibit Employers from Demanding Access to Jobseekers' Social Media Accounts Moves Closer to Law

SPRINGFIELD – In response to reports that some employers have required jobseekers to provide them with account names and passwords to access personal social networking accounts like Facebook, state Rep. La Shawn K. Ford (D-Chicago) on Thursday passed legislation through the Illinois House to make the practice illegal.

"I was shocked to learn that some employers were demanding access to private social network accounts of jobseekers, and then turning them away for refusing," Ford said. "Imagine a 62 year old jobseeker who looks much younger, who is then not hired when the employer finds out his or her true age through his Facebook page. This is clearly a backdoor way to learn protected information about jobseekers, and it's a completely unacceptable invasion of privacy."

Ford's House Bill 3782 makes it unlawful for any employer to request or require any employee or prospective employee to provide any password or other related account information in order to gain access to the employee's or prospective employee's account or profile on a social networking website.

A social network is defined as an internet-based service that allows individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system created by the service, create a list of other users with whom they share a connection within the system, and view and navigate their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The legislation does not prevent an employer from regulating the usage of social networks on company equipment.

"This is an issue of privacy," said state Rep. Mike Fortner (R-West Chicago), a co-sponsor of the legislation. "We need to keep separate what employees and potential employees do on their own time, off company hours. Employers have the right to control how their equipment is used and can view public information like anyone else. But there is not a need for personal information on a social networking site that doesn't interfere with their workplace."

For more information, please call one of Ford's constituent service offices: call the Oak Park office at (708) 445-3673 or the Chicago office at (773) 378-5902.

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