



March 14, 2016

Presidential Candidates Need to Make Re-Entry a Priority in America

We held a press conference on March 13 with men and women living with a criminal background in America and we called on presidential candidates to make re-entry issues a priority for the United States. The press conference was held at the Criminal Court Building of the Circuit Court of Cook County at 26th and California.

A criminal background in America is a disability that prevents citizens from living a productive life in America. This is not about political gain - this is about justice. Americans with criminal records should be given a second chance if they have served their time and are fully committed to obeying the laws of the land. Even those who were wrongfully convicted have to carry the burden of a negative image on their shoulders. This is causing us to see a repeated cycle in our prison system and communities. We must not turn our backs and pretend this is not an issue with our family, friends and community.

Commissioner Howard C. Medley, a veteran with a Purple Heart and a community leader, shares many of the issues that plague those with a background. "I'm a black, 89 year old man, a Democrat and role model in the community," Medley said at the press conference. "I was wrongfully convicted and jailed 28 years ago, and I still can't live the American dream. I am trying to clear my name for a crime I did not commit in the first place. Today, I have been suffering and have spent over a million dollars trying to clear my name, and all the while my business also suffers because of it." Also speaking at the press conference were Randy Ryder and Levem Murphy.

In the United States, more than 100 million people have some form of a criminal record. According to the Brennan Center for Justice, every arrest comes with a sentence: guilty or not guilty. A 2012 survey by the Society for Human Resource Management, found that 86 percent of employers use criminal background checks on at least some candidates, with the majority - 69 percent - checking all candidates. In a similar 2010 survey by the same group, 31 percent of respondents said an arrest without conviction would at least be "somewhat influential" in their hiring decision.

I've even face challenges after being charged with a misdemeanor in the federal system. Recently I was rejected by TSA for priority boarding because of an error in how my record was reported. People who are productive and want to continue to be productive citizens in America should not be denied their full liberty in America. Immigration, global warming, and many international issues are being debated, but we must ask our candidates running for President of the United States - who are asking for our votes -

that they make issues dealing with re-entry of our returning and returned citizens a priority if our nation is to heal its wounds. So many people who have paid their debt to society still struggle to find ways to clear their names - struggling for total freedom and the opportunities they deserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Ford', written in a cursive style.

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District