



THE MAIL

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"Box"-ing Our Ears

The July 25 Councilmania went a little nuts in its description and grading of Bill 07--741 "Ban the Box" Fair Criminal Record Screening Practices. In its first sentence City Paper criticizes the bill, saying it would "preclude the city's human resources department from checking job applicants' criminal backgrounds."

That would be bad. Except that's not what the bill does. The city would still conduct background checks where the law says it has to, and city agencies would still conduct background checks if it determined the position required one.

All the bill does is remove the box on the job application where prospective city employees are asked to check "yes" or "no" if they have ever been convicted of a crime. Rather than eliminating a person from consideration because of a check in the wrong box, 6th District Councilwoman Sharon Green Middleton's bill gives people a chance to have their qualifications considered and, if appropriate, to receive an interview. For jobs in which it is appropriate to conduct a background check, one will be run, and if their background is not a good fit for the position, the person will not be offered the job. On the other hand, if the position is not as sensitive, the agency would be able to select the person it deemed most qualified for the job.

Councilwoman Middleton's bill is not inventing the wheel. Other cities such as Philadelphia, Chicago, and Boston have adopted or are considering this measure. Recently, Angela Rudolph from the mayor's office in Chicago came to Baltimore and presented at a forum and described how the process has helped both the city and those with a criminal background (see website).

The Baltimore City Council should pass this bill and City Paper should support its doing so. It will make a big difference to some people who deserve a second chance. Equally important, it will send a critical message to the private sector that people with a blemish in their background deserve to at least be considered for a job.

People with criminal backgrounds need to be able to find work and earn money just like the rest of us. If we maintain a hiring process in which they can't even be considered for a job, we all stand to lose.

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