

Champion legislation increases reentry support for offenders

Written by

Monday, 16 February 2009 16:42

State Rep. Bobby Champion (DFL – 58B) joined State Sen. Mee Moua last week to discuss the importance of second chances and offender reentry issues as part of “Second Chance Day on the Hill.”

“From my perspective, public policy is about forgiveness,” said Champion, who is working with other legislators to address reentry issues this session. “While it’s important for people to face the consequences of criminal activity, we also need to strike a balance that allows individuals who have paid their debt to society to have a fair chance to rejoin society.”

“This is about redemption – and about moving forward. It’s about helping people who have paid for poor choices pursue the things that most of us take for granted - like renting an apartment, driving to work, obtaining a job and going to school. We know reformed offenders are far less likely to commit new crimes if they have better housing, educational and work options,” Champion said.

The second chance movement is made up of community members, advocacy organizations, legislators and ex-offenders to address Minnesota’s collateral sanctions and to provide safe and effective avenues to full community membership for ex-offenders. The movement is based on the growing realization that a criminal justice system that simply punishes is not right or effective.

Sanctions against ex-offenders in Minnesota restrict people from pursuing certain careers and obtaining professional licenses, limit housing options and access to education. Those who were arrested but who may have never been convicted of a crime are also harmed by collateral sanctions and are being denied employment or housing based solely on an arrest or court appearance. Additionally, unofficial sanctions from landlords and prospective employers are often more severe and longer-lasting than their criminal punishment.

Legislation to address some of Minnesota’s collateral sanctions was introduced last week by Champion and Moua. The legislation includes: safe hiring of individuals with criminal records, record sealing changes, a “Ban the Box” bill requiring public employers to remove criminal records questions from applications, and a higher education criminal records notice.

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“We all benefit when good people are able to find and keep work,” said Moua. “I am hopeful that this legislation will begin to remove some of the unintended consequences of collateral sanctions and help people move beyond their past to become contributing members of society.”