

February 7, 2012

To the Honorable members of the Committee on
Corrections and Juvenile Justice

Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Kurt Young and I am a small businessman here in Topeka. I retired after 33 years with SBC Corporation and went into business for myself in 2005. I am by no means a large employer but consistently have anywhere from 15 to 20 employees. Having always been compassionate to those who have struggled to succeed in life I have made it a practice during the last seven years to try, when given the opportunity, to help someone with a questionable past attempt to make it in this world.

Before I proceed any further with my testimony to you, I have to ask a fundamental question of each of you. That question is this. "Do you feel that anyone convicted of a crime and having served their respective penalty, whatever that may have been, should be punished for the rest of their life for that crime if there has been no repeat offense?" If your answer to this question is yes then I am wasting my time and should go no further.

If your answer is no then you should listen carefully to what I have to say.

To date, as a businessman, I have hired two known recovering alcoholics, one with a record; an individual who had just been released from Leavenworth two weeks earlier having served five years for a felony offense; another individual with a record and most recently, about a year ago, I hired a person who is a registered offender. Understand that in all cases I made a conscious decision to hire an individual with a past. I did so because I had a need that could be filled and there was an underlying element that I thought I might have the opportunity to make a difference in someone's life.

I worked with these individuals, counseled them in areas where they needed assistance and in general tried to help them succeed. I don't want any medals or recognition for the effort, that is the way my parents brought me up. I succeeded in some cases and I failed in others. But it was my choice because I felt they deserved the opportunity.

Unfortunately, the current system penalizes any business for any such effort. If you don't already know how this happens, by now you are asking--how. The current system, in addition to mapping the offender's home address on all of the official registries as the location of an offender, also flags the place of employment with the same identification!

Several months ago I heard a news report on a major network of a judge (not in Kansas) who wanted to register a 12 year old boy as a sex offender for 'mooning' someone. While think that is an appalling idea, I am not here to debate the merits of that decision. But if that were to ever happen in our state that young boy would be prohibited from having an equal opportunity to become gainfully employed at some later stage of his life due to the fact that any business that hired him would be flagged on any official registry. Is that what you want? Are you really helping the situation or contributing to the problem?

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So I ask you. Are we truly trying to protect the public or trying to prohibit the offender from ever getting a job and becoming a productive member of society? Because once I found that my business was flagged the same as the offender's residence, I had to ask myself if it was worth it. In my case I said yes for reasons that are not material to this discussion. But how many employers would ever knowingly hire an offender with the intent of giving them a second chance if they knew their business would receive this negative attention and identification. Here is the most shocking part of this program-- I truly suspect that very few business people even know this is happening. I only found out by accident and in my discussions around the community I have not found any other business person that knew this was happening.

The possibilities for negative attention to the business as a result of this identification are too many to mention. Just let your imagination run wild for a few minutes and I am sure you could list just about everything that could possibly happen and none of those possibilities are positive for the business.

I asked you earlier if you really and truly wanted offenders to be punished for the rest of their life. If you answered yes then flagging the employer's location on the registry is a step in the right direction. If you said no, then PLEASE don't penalize any business that hires a known offender by flagging their business on the offender registry mapping site.

Thank you for your time and attention to this request.

Respectfully,

A. Kurt Young