

**Testimony of United States Senator Ron Johnson**  
***H.R. 1076, The Fair Chance to Compete for Jobs Act***  
**Wednesday, March 13, 2019**

*As prepared for delivery*

Chairmen Connolly and Raskin, Ranking Members Meadows and Roy, thank you for holding a hearing on the Fair Chance to Compete for Jobs Act and giving me the opportunity to testify on its behalf. I also want to thank Senator Booker, Congressmen Cummings and Collins, and others for working with me on this legislation over the last few years.

Our founders specified three unalienable rights endowed to all by our Creator: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. In comparison to life and liberty, I used to think the pursuit of happiness was a more frivolous concept—a less important right. I no longer believe that.

Life without dignity, and liberty without the freedom to dream, aspire, and earn your own success, would be rights with dramatically diminished value. The right to pursue happiness is therefore crucial in the fulfillment of the first two rights, life and liberty.

Few will ever be truly happy living in dependency. Work is essential in allowing individuals to pursue happiness by providing them the dignity of earning their own success. For those reentering society after incarceration, work is the key factor in determining whether they will turn their lives around, or end up back behind bars. One study showed that those who maintained employment for one year post-release had a 16 percent probability of returning to prison, versus a 52 percent probability for those without jobs.

A lower rate of re-incarceration should result in less crime. Instead of bearing the cost of imprisoning people, communities can benefit from their contribution to the tax base. But most importantly, these individuals aren't just statistics; they are human beings, and we should all want to see them succeed in life.

The Fair Chance to Compete for Jobs Act recognizes the crucial role employment plays in transforming lives. Just because some have temporarily lost their freedom because they committed a crime, does not mean they have also lost their right to pursue happiness.

My work with formerly incarcerated men and women in Wisconsin has shown me the significant barriers they face putting their lives back together once they leave prison. My involvement in the Joseph Project, where we connect those genuinely seeking to turn their lives around with job opportunities throughout the state, has taught me how transformational a good paying job can be. It is the most inspirational activity my staff and I have been involved in since I took office.

I fully understand the legitimate concerns employers have about offering a job to someone convicted of a crime. Many criminals will never reform and could pose a significant threat and danger to an organization. But many others who have been incarcerated realize a life of crime offers no positive future. It is those individuals—and their future employers—that this legislation seeks to help.

Employers who give Joseph Project participants a chance consistently tell me they have some of the best attitudes within their organization. Having a positive attitude and making a daily commitment to succeed are the key elements of the Joseph Project's 12 hour training program. Employers who have taken that chance have been rewarded with great employees.

The Fair Chance to Compete for Jobs Act simply provides the opportunity for an applicant to convey the right attitude and what they can contribute to an organization without being automatically excluded for consideration because of their checkered past. People do choose to turn their lives around, and society should make it easier, not harder, for them to do so.

Prior to hiring, an employer will still have access to an applicant's complete history in order to make a fully informed hiring decision. Nothing in this legislation prevents that. It is also important to note this legislation only applies to the federal government and its contractors, although we do hope other employers will see its value and voluntarily adopt similar hiring policies.

Working with the Joseph Project, numerous employers in Wisconsin are already being rewarded with dedicated employees by deciding to hire individuals with criminal records. Nationally, other large employers including Facebook, Google, Walmart, and Koch Industries have not only pledged to delay the criminal background check, but have also begun hiring formerly incarcerated individuals. My hope is that by passing the Fair Chance to Compete for Jobs Act, employers throughout America will see the value in helping people transform their lives through productive employment.