



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF WISCONSIN EDUCATION FUND

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June 1, 2011

To: Assembly Committee on Education

Re: Opposition to AB 122

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin has consistently opposed legislation that unfairly denies work opportunities for ex-offenders from the criminal justice system. The current law, which allows denial of employment if the circumstances of a conviction relate to the circumstances of the job, seems to have fairly addressed the concerns of businesses and organizations.

The proposed legislation, AB 122, allows an educational agency to refuse to employ or to terminate employment of an individual who has been convicted of a felony and has not been pardoned, whether or not the circumstances of the felony substantially relate to the circumstances of the particular job. This bill raises significant concerns.

The safety of children can often raise special concerns but this bill provides only a superficial protection. The current law does not *require* an employer to hire a person with a conviction. That protection already exists. So it is some concern to us that this legislation is directed not for actual need but for appearance.

For over a decade, legislators in the State of Wisconsin have continued to create and reclassify a significant number of felonies. Since there are a miniscule number of pardons issued to ex-offenders we believe it is necessary to raise questions regarding undesirable and unintended consequences from this bill.

Can this be used to arbitrarily deny work opportunities for ex-offenders whose felonies were well in the past? Is there any protection for an employed ex-offender with satisfactory work performance from arbitrary termination? Are there positions in which employees have contact with their direct supervisors only and should not be included? And most important, if this bill is enacted will it be used as precedent for other employers to allow any conviction record as a basis for employment discrimination?

It is important to remember that the ability of ex-offenders to responsibly re-enter society through adequate employment opportunities greatly lessens the incidence of recidivism and its high cost to the public. If we continue to deny opportunities for employment to felons and other offenders there can be no meaningful re-integration into ordinary society. The public will continue to bear the onerous costs of such policy.

For these reasons the League of Women Voters opposes AB122. Thank you for considering our comments on this important matter.