



August 9, 2011

Jacqueline Berrien, Chair
Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
131 M Street, N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20507

Dear Chair Berrien:

The Sentencing Project, a national research and advocacy organization focused on promoting a fair and effective justice system, applauds the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's (EEOC) recent hearing and consideration of the significant employment challenges facing people with criminal records. The Sentencing Project urges the EEOC to use its authority to eliminate the discriminatory and unfair hiring practices confronting people with criminal records.

People with criminal records encounter social stigma that may last a lifetime and can make finding employment, and leading a crime free life, difficult. Surveys of employers find that those with criminal records are among the least desirable hires, even ranking inexperienced applicants more likely to receive a job opportunity. Indeed a recent report from the National Employment Law Project found that some of the nation's biggest employers categorically disqualified people with criminal records in public job announcements. Moreover, even arrests that did not result in a conviction have been shown to negatively impact employment opportunities.

Broad exclusions from employment that provide applicants no opportunity to explain the circumstances of their cases are discriminatory and should be ended. Employers should be educated about appropriate hiring practices and the benefits of expanding their candidate pool to qualified applicants even if they have a criminal record.

People with criminal records are a growing proportion of the American public; excluding this segment of our population from gainful employment harms their opportunity for successful rehabilitation and limits our nation's economic strength. The Sentencing Project urges the EEOC to aggressively enforce current laws protecting this population against discrimination and to effectively utilize its influence in educating the public about this issue.

I thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Marc Mauer
Executive Director