

Ladies and Gentlemen of North Dakota's 67th Legislative Assembly,

I believe the proposed changes in House Bill No. 1196 need to be approved and implemented into North Dakota Century Code. I have friends and family who I've witnessed turn their lives around and make positive changes for themselves after incarceration. There is no reason why their non-violent past should continue to haunt them; preventing them from creating a brighter future for themselves and their families.

Individuals released from the correctional institution seemingly have the deck stacked against them. Barriers such as housing and employment, which both routinely perform criminal background checks, can appear insurmountable with criminal charges on one's record. We as a society collectively tell the formerly incarcerated to get their life together. But how do you continue to get your life together when you have the continual dark cloud of a criminal record hanging over your head?

I've witnessed the resiliency of one man who has been convicted of a non violent felony. He served his incarceration time and successfully completed his probation. He has done well for himself as an entrepreneur. At one point he and I attempted buying into a franchise but we were denied by the company because of the criminal conviction on his record. It's these types of scenarios where you as a legislator have the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of people who are trying their best to improve their circumstances. Words matter. Choosing to replace the words "charged with" and replace them with "convicted of" will undoubtedly positively impact lives. We all know that mistakes happen, people get falsely accused, charges get dropped and dismissed regularly. On top of all that we as citizens have a right to due process and are supposed to be presumed innocent until proven guilty. If that really is the standard then making the proposed changes is the only moral option.

Respectfully,

Skyler Dutton