



## **New Poll: North Carolina Small Business Owners Support Policies to Reduce Employment Barriers for People with Criminal Records**

North Carolina is home to [more than 964,000](#) small businesses that employ over 1.7 million people. According to Small Business Majority, a national small business advocacy organization, hiring and retaining a ready workforce is a growing problem. Meanwhile, the organization notes, at least [1.6 million North Carolinians](#) have a criminal record, which can significantly impact their employment opportunities, even if they only have been convicted of minor offenses. Without access to stable work, Small Business Majority asserts that people with a criminal record are more likely to live in poverty and to be re-arrested.

In a February 2023 [poll](#), Small Business Majority found that most small business owners in North Carolina support state and federal policies that reduce obstacles to employment for people with criminal records. The poll collected responses from 100 North Carolina small business owners, with 41% identifying as Democrats, 32% as Republicans, and 24% as Independents. Most respondents (84%) use criminal background checks as part of their hiring processes, and some cited concerns about general workplace liability issues associated with hiring someone with a criminal record. Still, they expressed broad support for reforms:

- **83% support Clean Slate policies**, which automatically seal certain criminal records if a person is not re-arrested for a set period. Sealing the record means it will not show up on background checks, removing one of the most significant hurdles that individuals with criminal histories face when applying for jobs.
- **82% support ending driver's license suspensions solely based on unpaid court fines and fees.** A suspended driver's license can make it difficult for people to get to interviews and to work.
- **57% support federal legislation banning private-sector employers from asking applicants about their criminal histories.**

Survey respondents see the benefits of employment for justice-involved people, their families, and their communities:

- **76% agree that a job is one of the most important factors in determining if someone will be re-arrested.**
- **82% agree that removing employment barriers would reduce the need for government assistance** – thus saving tax dollars.

The poll also highlighted the role of education and incentives in encouraging business owners to hire people with criminal records:

- **79% said that they were more likely to hire people with criminal records after learning about the Federal Bonding Program and the Federal Work Opportunity Tax credit**, which provide financial incentives to employers to hire justice-involved people.

Overall, these results show support among diverse North Carolina small business owners for policies that reduce employment barriers for people with criminal records. They recognize that these policies

provide a second chance for individuals with criminal histories, alleviate immediate workforce issues, and contribute to economic growth.

The full report from Small Business Majority is [here](#).

The UNC School of Government is non-partisan, non-advocacy and responsive to the needs of public officials. We do not advocate for any political ideology or policy outcome or allow our personal beliefs or those of our audiences to influence our work.

This paper may not be copied or posted online, nor transmitted, in printed or electronic form, without the written permission of the School of Government, except as allowed by fair use under United States copyright law. For questions about use of the document and permission for copying, contact the School of Government.

© 2023 School of Government. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill