



October 23, 2015

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The Women Donors Network, a membership organization of progressive women philanthropic donors, urges you to issue an executive order ensuring that Americans with arrests or convictions in their past not be unfairly shut out of employment. These individuals should have a fair chance to apply for a job with federal agencies and federal contractors. A past mistake should not become a life sentence to joblessness.

The Women Donors Network (WDN) has a membership of over 200 women from across the country, and our members collectively and individually grant over \$150 million a year towards building a more fair, equitable, and sustainable world. Our Criminal (In)Justice Circle works to address the impact of mass incarceration, and supports the leadership of formerly incarcerated people in creating change. We are particularly concerned about the disproportionately negative impact of the criminal justice system on women and families, particularly in communities of color.

*Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families*, by the Ella Baker Center and partners, is a groundbreaking report that highlights the huge direct and hidden costs of incarceration. These costs are often borne by women of color and their families. The survey found that 76% of formerly incarcerated respondents said finding work was difficult or nearly impossible, and five years after release 67% of respondents remained unemployed or underemployed. Families who already have limited resources struggle to help loved ones meet needs for housing, employment, and health services.

We appreciated your recent speech at the NAACP conference where you called for “ban the box” policies to provide more opportunities for people with criminal records. The National Employment Law Project has found that more than 65 million people with a criminal record have been essentially barred from finding secure, sustainable employment as a result of these policies. We look forward to decisive action from you on this issue.

We hope you will issue an executive order ensuring that both federal agencies and federal contractors eliminate unnecessary barriers to employment of people with conviction records. The federal government can model fair and just hiring policies for people with records, and demonstrate how this change helps support stronger families and communities. Thank you for your leadership on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Donna Hall  
President & CEO  
Women Donors Network