Dear Governor,

The executive order you signed into effect for banning the question about criminal history on state applications was a tremendous start to allowing Georgia’s past convicted persons fair state employment opportunities and aiding reform of the state’s criminal justice system. You have supported efforts to get Georgian’s back to work over the years, but I believe this was at the top of those accomplishments. However, I believe there is a much deeper impact you can make on Georgia’s large community of past inmates by extending the ‘Ban the Box’ order to private employers.

According to Georgia’s State Board of Pardons and Paroles, about 1 of every 13 Georgia residents is under some sort of correctional governance which makes this great state the fourth highest inmate population in the country. Because of the high inmate population in the state of Georgia, there is a great need to expand the opportunity of released men and women to work jobs that allow for proper sustainment. The enlargement of ‘Ban the Box’ in Georgia to the private sector would mean a lowered recidivism rate and a greater increase of employment opportunities for those with past convictions, as well as create the opportunity for the greater success of accomplishing the goals set forth in the original executive order of improving public safety and enhancing work development.

When one looks at the state job availabilities, a large number of jobs are targeted toward those with education and experience in specialized fields. Many of those with past convictions may not go in with proper education or experience, and of those, most do not have the opportunity to complete a degree or gain a trade due to shorter sentences and long wait times to enroll. Many of Georgia’s ex-inmates simply do not qualify for state jobs which continue to leave a majority in the position to continue experiencing prejudice without having the opportunity to explain their past. I have personally seen the effects of this type of unfair treatment and understand how much of a positive effect banning the box on private employment applications would help.

I have a dear friend who will be 50 this year. He served his country in the Marine Corp for 4 years beginning at about age 19. When his enlistment was up, he decided to go back to his small Ohio city in the early 1990s when crack cocaine had become the popular poor man’s drug. He had a failing marriage and two very young kids when he was introduced to this drug that he felt helped him cope. Unfortunately, addiction quickly set in and he began robbing local stores and businesses by snatching money from cash registers to support his habit. After turning himself in on several different occasions at the pleading of family and close friends, he ended up serving a total of 13 ½ years in and out of prison. The very first time he stood before a judge, he told him that he was a Marine who proudly served his country and he needed his country to serve him by getting him help for his addiction. The judge told him that he too had been a Marine and there is no excuse for his addiction or the things he did to support it. That downward spiral led to him returning to drugs until the last time he was convicted in 2001. After having lost both parents to cancer and conquering cancer himself while incarcerated, he made some changes. Not only has he been clean and sober for almost 15 years, he shares his story with others he feels will benefit. Yet, he has not been able to find one job since his release in early 2007 because he checks that box about past convictions on applications. Everyone that knows him personally say he is a good man who treats his family and loved ones with kindness. He is a hard meticulous worker at whatever odd and end jobs he can find like cutting a lawn or maybe painting a deck.

There is a woman I know that served 11 months in Georgia prison because she was pulled into a scam on her job. She has been out almost a year and has had a horrible experience. A couple months after release she applied for a job working in the food industry on a college campus and despite being honest on the application she was actually hired. Within the first 3 weeks, her immediate supervisor wanted her to work more hours with administrative tasks which were right up her alley. She felt so blessed to have been given the opportunity to rebuild her life. On her way to work during the fourth week, she received a call from her employer stating that she is no longer employed due to her background check. She was devastated. During her interview, no one asked her about the conviction, but if she had been given the opportunity to explain what happened, I believe she would still be employed. No one else will give her a chance because she checks the box, and now this mother of 3 has to live with friends.

I could give a couple of other examples, but I know you understand the dilemma most people released from prison face. They can’t get jobs. They can’t rent an apartment. They can only receive minimal public assistance and so on. There are currently 23 states that have joined the ‘Ban the Box’ movement on state applications, yet 6 of those states require public employers to also ‘Ban the Box’. Since Georgia is fourth in the country for the number of inmates, it is a great necessity for us to join those 6 states and require public employers to ‘Ban the Box’. Not every inmate is a lifetime criminal and not all are bad people. Many are people that have gotten caught up in the wrong situations or developed the wrong habits. Those who are truly reformed due to incarceration or shear will should not carry the burden of unemployment, poverty and unproductive living for the rest of their lives. There are many inmates who need a fair chance by everyone, not just the state employers.

Governor Deal, I want to thank you for banning the box on state applications and showing your support for released inmates. Thank you for your very precious time reading this letter. I believe you will consider the expansion of banning the box as you have a true heart for the people of Georgia. Please feel free to contact me at the address, email or phone number below, as I am very passionate about this cause. I am willing to assist in any way I can.

Most Sincerely,

Since the ‘Ban the Box’ movement is fairly new to me, the first step I would take in building my advocacy efforts to create change would be to study the 6 states who have extending the policy to private sectors. Understanding the avenues of success and any opposition the states faced would help to create a much larger campaign in Georgia. Another step I would take is to make contact with the advocacy group that brought ‘Ban the Box’ to Georgia and persuaded the creation of the executive order signed by Governor Deal. As far as I know, there are no other efforts in the state to expand the order, but I would need to verify. If there are other efforts, I would join with them and assist any way I could. If there are not efforts, my focus would be getting them on board by presenting the pool of state jobs in existence proving there needs to be a wider range of opportunities opened to Georgians with past convictions. Third, I would attempt to get on board with the national ‘Ban the Box’ movement in order to gain some insight as to what has made them so successful in getting half of the country on board. Lastly, I would attempt to bring awareness of the order and what the expansion could do to help Georgia to other state legislature by sending letters.