



April 10, 2019
Hand Delivered

The Honorable Phil Bryant
Governor
Post Office Box 139
Jackson, Mississippi 39205

Re: Thank You for Supporting Fresh Start (SB 2781)

Governor Bryant,

We are writing to thank you for your unflinching commitment to improving the lives of ordinary Mississippians and their families. In your time as governor, job creation has exploded. During your eight years in office, Mississippi's unemployment rate has fallen from a high of 9.2 percent to a low of 4.7 percent. Currently, we have more than 40,000 unfilled positions statewide.

As governor you have also spearheaded commonsense criminal justice reforms aimed at helping ex-offenders turn their lives around. As a result, we have seen both property crime and violent crime fall. The state's prison population has declined. By focusing on rehabilitation, education and opportunity, ex-offenders are being invited to take responsibility for their future, even as they are being held accountable for their past.

Employment is a vital part of reintegrating ex-offenders into their families and communities. Work is the key to staying out of prison and off of welfare. Work is an essential part of the "success sequence" that is the pathway to prosperity in America. Studies show work reduces recidivism.

One of the bills on your desk today provides a unique opportunity to bring a message of hope to the thousands of Mississippians released from prison each year. Their hope is that it's not too late for them. Their hope is that they, too, can share in the American dream. Thanks to the leadership of Lt. Governor Tate Reeves, Speaker Philip Gunn, Senator John Polk and Rep. Mark Baker, this legislation (SB 2781) would create a "Fresh Start" for these ex-offenders.

The premise behind Fresh Start is simple. The bill directs occupational licensing boards to eliminate unconstitutional and bureaucratic rules that prevent ex-offenders from working. Every board is still free to set their own standards regarding which ex-offenders are allowed to obtain a license. The bill, however, requires that the boards adopt a “rational basis” in doing so. To do otherwise, as the Mississippi Supreme Court cautioned in *Chunn v. State* (2015), is to risk violating the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment.

According to the Institute for Justice, Mississippi requires an occupational license for 66 out of 102 mid-to-low-level occupations, ranging from barbers to pest control applicators to landscape contractors. Fresh Start will allow ex-offenders to train for and obtain these jobs. This is far better than the alternatives of minimum-wage work and welfare dependency.

Fresh Start will create new opportunities for ex-offenders. It will also protect our boards from litigation. It will help restore families by allowing ex-offenders to show their children how hard work and dedicated study can pay off. At the same time, Fresh Start leaves every occupational licensing board free to protect consumer health and safety by maintaining rigorous standards for licensure.

We look forward to your signing this significant piece of legislation and fulfilling your pledge to make sure *every Mississippian* who wants a *job* has one.

Thank you for your courageous leadership,



Dr. Jameson Taylor
Vice President for Policy
Mississippi Center for Public Policy



Doug Kellogg
State Projects Director
Americans for Tax Reform



David Safavian
General Counsel
American Conservative Union



Trey Dellinger
State Director
Americans for Prosperity – Miss.



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