HB22-1098 Department Of Regulatory Agencies Barriers To Practice Regulated Professions

Monday, February 28 2022
House Finance Committee 1:30 pm | HCR 0112
Testimony: Support

Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and committee members. My name is Adam Burg, and I'm the vice president of government affairs at the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce.

I am here today to express our organization's support of HB22-1098.

Last year, US News & World Report named Colorado the #2 economy in the United States. The Milken Institute also released its 2021 Best Performing Cities report, and Colorado had three cities in the top 20, the most of any state. Denver-Aurora-Lakewood ranked 11th overall in Tier 1 cities, a jump of seven spots from the 2020 rankings. Fort Collins ranked 12th overall, a jump of nine spots. In the Tier II category: Colorado Springs ranks 17th (a jump of 19 spots over 2020). Denver specifically saw the sixth-most economic growth over the decade out of any American metro with a population over 1 million, according to a recent report from the Brookings Institution.

But that doesn't mean everyone saw that growth and opportunity. Denver metro is ranked 43 out of 53 large metros for its large gap between the number of employed white people and the number of employed people of color. We know we can do better, and employers want to do better. One of our leading goals is to fight for policies that bring down barriers to employment for our most vulnerable residents and create an economy that provides access to opportunities for all Coloradans.

To put it simply, we know that our economy will be stronger when everyone can be part of our collective success. Requiring an audit of licensing programs administered by DORA allows us to see what barriers exist for people who have been incarcerated. Other states have looked at this issue and we suspect that, like them, there are some places that no prior convictions make sense for licensure and liability, but also many places where that requirement should be removed.

In working with our partners at Checkr, a company deeply involved in fair chance hiring, two things have become apparent. The number of companies who have ordered background checks from Checkr in Denver since 2019 has grown exponentially, from 620 in 2019 to over 1,500 in 2021. At the same time, the number of companies who have hired candidates with records in Denver since 2019 also continues to go up, from 188 in 2019 to over 400 in 2021.

Today, one in three Americans have a criminal record, ranging from minor offenses to extensive conviction histories. This leads to a brutal cycle of recidivism—due to a criminal record, their job application is met with greater scrutiny. They are five times more likely to be unemployed and are at greater risk of committing offenses out of survival. And we know that employment is the single most important influence on decreasing recidivism.

For all the aforementioned reasons, the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce in coordination with Prosper Colorado support HB 22-1098. Thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions you might have.