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Ald. Chantia Lewis
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Council signs off on “Ban the Box” legislation for city job applicants

The Milwaukee Common Council on Tuesday approved legislation that will enshrine as law the City of Milwaukee’s practice of eliminating questions about prior criminal history from applications for employment with the city, according to the measure’s lead sponsor, **Alderman Chantia Lewis**.

The city’s Department of Employee Relations enacted a policy several years ago that removed requirements for applicants to check a box indicating if they had a criminal past. But Alderman Lewis said that approving a council resolution on the matter creates a higher degree of permanence for the “Ban the Box” policy, and demonstrates to other local employers the city’s commitment to helping ex-offenders find jobs.

“Once someone has paid their debt to society and atoned for their wrongdoing, their past mistakes should not dictate their future endeavors,” Alderman Lewis said. “I am proud to say that, as the employer of around 7,000 municipal employees, the City of Milwaukee continues to stay ahead of the curve on this important issue.”

While finding stable, family-sustaining employment is critical for ex-offenders who are seeking to reintegrate into society, Alderman Lewis said that the stigma of their criminal history is often difficult to overcome. She said many potential employers include questions about criminal history on the initial application for employment, and that information can be used to unlawfully discriminate against job applicants.

When appropriate and allowable under the law, candidates for employment with the city will be subjected to background checks further along in the hiring process, Alderman Lewis said, after their individual qualifications have been considered.