

OHIO LOOKS TO REDUCE LAWS PREVENTING FELONS TO WORK



Lawmakers in the state of Ohio are trying to find ways to ease the multitude of restrictions placed on felons released from prison that prevents them from acquiring jobs. These restrictions are known as collateral sanctions that total close to 800 stipulations that have been written into the Ohio constitution, laws, and administrative codes of the state. Some felons, depending on the extent of the crime, are not able to obtain a job as simple as cutting hair or driving a truck because they are not allowed to obtain a driver's license. Felons can also be barred from other jobs such as athletic training, being a pawn broker, being a banker or even insurance sales. The governor of Ohio, John Kasich, called a meeting last week of state lawmakers, prosecutors, and judges in an effort to discuss how to remove some of the regulations preventing non-violent felons from finding jobs. "This is a case where people who are convicted of felonies are basically denied an opportunity to do some really simple things that would allow them to be reintegrated into our society," the Republican governor said. "If you are convicted of a felony, and that could be a non violent felony. . . you can't get a commercial driver's license. So we have 5,000 truck driving jobs in the state of Ohio, and you can't drive a truck." Kasich understands that his efforts will not be popular with a lot of his Republican cohorts because those same Republicans worked hard over the previous decade to pass a series of tough laws dealing with mandatory sentencing. "Sometimes legislation gets put up at a time when there is a political firestorm going on and the next thing you know there are some things done that shouldn't have been done," Kasich said. A group that is led by Lawrence Travis of the University of Cincinnati's Center for Criminal Justice Research has written a report titled "Collateral consequences of criminal convictions in Ohio." Hundreds of Ohio judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys and parole officers were interviewed for the report. The majority of people interviewed for the report feel that the time has come for the criminal justice system in the state to do something about the impact of the sanctions on felons. "This is evidenced by considerable agreement that some collateral consequences should be repealed, consequences should not last forever or be made any more troublesome, and defendants should have a chance to restore their rights," the report concluded. Carlo LoParo, a spokesman for the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, had the following to say: "We're looking for some kind of common ground to move forward with sanctions, to remove some of them." Shirley Smith, a state senator from Cleveland, had the following to say about the meeting held by Kasich: "He speaks about it from a moral perspective," Smith said. "If we do the right thing we will be saving families and neighborhoods. I think with him approaching it that way, people will see the problem from a different light. I am absolutely pleased."

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