



March 25, 2024

Mr. Chair, members of the Judiciary and Public Safety Committee,

The Minnesota Justice Research Center writes in regards to S.F. 4269, a bill to “ban the box” in higher education enrollment and expand educational opportunities for people on supervised release.

S.F. 4269 which can be summed up with one word: opportunity. In the 1990s, during a period of high crime, the pendulum swung too far toward punishment without thinking of the long-term consequences. For example, in 1994 President Bill Clinton signed a bill prohibiting incarcerated people from accessing Pell Grants.

S.F. 4269 seeks to restore balance by opening up more opportunities. This is a bipartisan effort happening in states across the country. In fact, the first state to “ban the box” for colleges and universities was Louisiana. Minnesota Justice Research Center staffers have worked on “ban the box” campaigns in the past with a broad swath of supporters: religious congregations, chambers of commerce, formerly incarcerated people, the list goes on.

People on supervision seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. They need clear goals and the means to achieve them. Opening up educational opportunities is a vital aspect of that path to getting back on their feet. Our policy director, Will Cooley, is community faculty at Metropolitan State University, where one of the best students he’s had in his career was serving a long probation sentence for methamphetamine issues.

Last year the Minnesota Justice Research Center interviewed people on supervision and probation agents and a theme that emerged was tailoring conditions and supervision terms to the individual. One person recently released from prison noted that he wanted to pursue higher education and he has the intelligence and resources to do so. This bill would allow him to enroll in college as a condition of his release..

In short, S.F. 4269 is another step in shifting Minnesota’s culture to one of punishment and catching failure to promoting success.

