

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 635:
CRIMINAL PROCEDURE – OCCUPATIONAL LICENSES OR CERTIFICATES –
ISSUANCE OF A CERTIFICATE OF EMPLOYABILITY**

TO: Hon. Joseph Vallario, Chair, and members of the House Judiciary Committee
FROM: Melissa Broome, Senior Policy Advocate
DATE: March 3, 2009

The Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) is an independent, nonprofit organization that advocates better jobs, skills training, and wages for low-income workers and job seekers in Maryland. We support HB 635, along with the sponsor's amendments, as a means of increasing the employability of job seekers with criminal records.

A growing number of occupations in Maryland are completely or almost completely closed to people with criminal records. In addition to not being able to work at schools or in patient care capacities, ex-offenders are either barred or hindered by statute from finding work as cosmetologists, electricians, HVAC apprentices, veterinary technicians, and LPNs to name a few.

In many instances, state and local laws require the automatic disqualification of people with convictions, regardless of whether the applicant is qualified or whether the conviction is relevant to the job.

HB 635 would help enable *non-violent* offenders become employable, productive members of society by requiring licensing authorities to take certain criteria into consideration before denying a license. Licensing authorities would still retain discretion to deny licenses to convicted persons, on grounds specified in the statute, where they believe denials are required by the relationship between the license and the underlying offense, or for public safety.

We support HB 635 because ex-offenders who are able to secure employment are more likely to succeed during the process of transition to the community. No one is served when individuals cannot engage in the workforce and remain self-sufficient. For these reasons, we respectfully urge a favorable report.