

# CITY OF PITTSBURGH

## Commission on Human Relations

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### CRIMINAL RECORDS AND COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

Pittsburgh (PA) - The City of Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations is encouraged by the U.S. Department of Education's recommendations for Colleges and Universities to increase access to higher education for individuals with criminal records, by going *beyond the box*. "The box" represents that required question in most college admission applications "*have you ever been convicted of a crime?*" Colleges and universities are instead encouraged to ask this question after admission has been determined. It further encourages these institutions to take into consideration other factors, and not to make their decision based solely on criminal backgrounds or incarceration history.

It is a known fact that persons of color are overrepresented at all levels of the criminal justice system throughout the country. As a result, *the box* systematically denies fair and equal access to higher education, safe and affordable housing and stable employment opportunities to millions of persons of color, once released from incarceration. The movement to address systemic barriers to persons with criminal records has been ongoing locally and nationally. In 2012, Pittsburgh City Council passed "ban the box" legislation to ensure equal employment opportunities to previously convicted persons applying for City jobs. In August 2013, the Commission published [Fair Housing Choice Analysis: Barriers to Housing Faced By Previously Incarcerated Persons](#), which identified the number of obstacles that a person encounters when they attempt to secure safe and affordable housing after incarceration. In recent months, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development also published recommendations related to alleviating barriers to housing for persons with a history of incarceration.

The Commission would like to encourage institutions of higher learning, housing providers and private employers in the City of Pittsburgh, Allegheny County and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to go *beyond the box!*

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