

March 12, 2024

The Honorable Soo Hong
Chairwoman
Senate Subcommittee of Judiciary Non-Civil
109 State Capitol
Atlanta, Georgia 30334

RE: Support of SB 157 Professions and Businesses; preclearance process in the licensing of individuals with criminal records who make an application to or investigated by certain licensing boards and commissions.

Dear Chairwoman Hong and Members of the Committee:

As a representative of Georgia's 1.2 million small businesses, Small Business Majority writes today in support of SB 157, legislation that will give Georgians a fair chance and help expand our state's skilled workforce by making it easier for entrepreneurs and jobseekers to obtain occupational licenses.

Georgia is a great place to live and work. In fact, [Area Development magazine](#) has named Georgia as the number one state for business for ten consecutive years. But, like many other states, small employers in our state are facing an ongoing talent shortage. Recent [Small Business Majority polling](#) found that 6 in 10 Georgia small businesses (59%) say the top challenge they face when hiring new employees is finding quality candidates. Given the tight labor market, it is essential we keep growing our workforce and strengthening our economy to ensure we have a strong and diverse talent pool for the small businesses that call Georgia home.

Labor shortages are exacerbated by the fact that 1 in 7 entry-level jobs in Georgia require an occupational license—with 25% of Georgia's high-demand jobs falling into this category. Meanwhile, more than 4 million [Georgians](#) have a criminal record, which creates significant barriers to obtaining these licenses. Even when records are pardoned or expunged, these individuals may still face barriers to obtaining occupational licenses, securing employment opportunities and pursuing entrepreneurship.

Fortunately, there's a solution. SB 157 will help Georgia follow the lead of other Southern states by giving all Georgians a fair chance to pursue occupational licenses and help expand our skilled workforce. SB 157 will promote employment and entrepreneurship opportunities by:

- Creating a predetermination process so people with prior criminal records can learn if their record disqualifies them before pursuing education and training
- Ensuring boards only consider relevant convictions that are recent or serious and have not been expunged or pardoned
- Ensuring due process protections so applicants feel heard and have a meaningful path to review decisions

For our neighbors who have paid their debt to society and are willing and eager to work, we should create opportunities that reduce recidivism and make it easier to start or work for a small business. In fact, according to [recent polling by Small Business Majority](#), a vast majority of Georgia small business owners (86%) say they would support reforms that would allow people with prior criminal records fairer access to occupational licenses. Opening access to occupational licensing can address the ongoing labor shortage, grow Georgia's economy and reduce recidivism. By taking these commonsense steps, our legislature can ensure the Peach State remains the number one state for business.

We urge the Senate Judiciary Committee to move forward and pass Senate Bill 157 to support small businesses across the state.

Sincerely,

Rachel Shanklin
Georgia Director
Small Business Majority