

Opinion poll: Small businesses support expanding occupational licensing for justice-impacted individuals

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Download full report from our website: <https://smallbusinessmajority.org/our-research/workforce/small-businesses-support-expanding-occupational-licensing-justice-impacted-individuals>

Methodology

This poll reflects a survey of 600 small business owners and decision-makers in Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, North Carolina, Tennessee and Texas. The poll was an online and phone survey conducted by Chesapeake Beach Consulting between February 5-11, 2024. The margin of error for each state survey is +/-10% at a 95% confidence level.

Survey Toplines

1. Just to confirm, are you the owner of a for-profit business?

Yes 100%

2. Please indicate your gender.

Male..... 53%

Female..... 46%

Gender nonconforming and/or nonbinary 1%

Prefer not to disclose..... 0%

Another option not listed here 0%

3. How many people does your company employ including yourself? Please include full-time and part-time employees, but do not include independent contractors.

2 to 10..... 60%

11 to 25 18%

26 to 50 10%

51 to 75 7%

75 to 100..... 5%

4. What is the zip code of your business?

Colorado..... 17%

Georgia 17%

Illinois 17%

North Carolina 17%

Tennessee..... 17%

Texas 17%

5. Which of the following categories best describes your business?

Agriculture & Mining	3%
Consulting & Business Services.....	7%
Education & Youth Services	2%
Energy & Utilities	1%
Engineering.....	2%
Food & Beverage	5%
Health, Beauty, Fitness	4%
Healthcare, Pharmaceuticals & Biotech.....	3%
Insurance & Financial Services	4%
Manufacturing.....	5%
Media & Entertainment	2%
Non-profit	<1%
Real Estate & Construction	17%
Retail.....	12%
Service and Consumer Services.....	8%
Software & Internet.....	1%
Technology, Computers & Electronics	4%
Telecommunications	1%
Transportation & Storage.....	3%
Travel, Recreation & Leisure.....	<1%
Wholesale & Distributors	4%
Other	13%

6. How optimistic or pessimistic are you about your business prospects over the next 6 months?

Very optimistic.....	42%
Somewhat optimistic.....	37%
Neither optimistic or pessimistic	8%
Somewhat pessimistic.....	9%
Very pessimistic	3%
Don't know	1%
Refused.....	1%
TOTAL OPTIMISTIC	79%
TOTAL PESSIMISTIC	11%

7. Rank the overall state of your business, where 1 indicates that your business is performing very poorly and 5 indicates it is performing very well.

One (Very Poorly).....	2%
Two.....	6%
Three	32%
Four.....	40%
Five (Very Well)	20%

TOTAL POORLY (one & two)	8%
NEITHER POORLY OR WELL (three)	32%
TOTAL WELL (four & five)	60%

8. Thinking ahead to the next six months, how likely is it that your business will add employees? Would you say it is very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, or very unlikely?

Very likely.....	25%
Somewhat likely	33%
Somewhat unlikely	13%
Very unlikely	19%
Not applicable to my business.....	3%
Not sure.....	9%
Refused.....	<1%
TOTAL LIKELY	57%
TOTAL UNLIKELY	31%

9. What are some challenges that you faced/are facing when hiring new employees?

SELECT ALL THAT APPLY

People expect higher pay.....	41%
Hard to find quality candidates.....	62%
No challenges	10%
Currently not hiring	23%
Other	4%
None of the above.....	2%

10. Which of the following actions have you performed to attract more workers?

SELECT ALL THAT APPLY

Increased pay	39%
Increased benefits	29%
Created more part-time positions	25%
Hired younger staff than usual.....	21%
Hired from within my local community.....	31%
Currently not hiring	25%
Other	3%
None of the above.....	6%

Now onto a different topic.

Thirty-three (33) states and the District of Columbia suspend or revoke driver’s licenses for unpaid traffic or court-related fines and fees. Many states also suspend licenses for failures to appear in court for traffic issues and other fine-only offenses.

Below are statements about driver’s license suspensions for unpaid fines or fees (this does not include failure to pay child support), or failure to appear for fine-only offenses. For each, indicate whether you agree or disagree.

11. Driver’s license suspensions for unpaid fines and fees negatively impact employers’ ability to hire employees that can reliably attend work.

Strongly agree	38%
Somewhat agree	33%
Somewhat disagree	13%
Strongly disagree.....	11%
Don’t know	5%
Refused.....	1%
TOTAL AGREE	71%
TOTAL DISAGREE	24%

12. Access to transportation is vital for our nation’s workforce.

Strongly agree	73%
Somewhat agree	19%
Somewhat disagree	4%
Strongly disagree.....	2%
Don’t know	2%
Refused.....	<1%
TOTAL AGREE	92%
TOTAL DISAGREE	6%

13. Driver’s license suspensions for unpaid fines and fees unfairly discriminate against low-income individuals.

Strongly agree	34%
Somewhat agree	27%
Somewhat disagree	14%
Strongly disagree.....	19%
Don’t know	6%
Refused.....	1%
TOTAL AGREE	61%
TOTAL DISAGREE	33%

For each of the following, please tell me if you support or oppose.

14. Proposals to end debt-based driver's license suspensions for unpaid court fines and fees.

Strongly support.....	38%
Somewhat support	29%
Somewhat oppose	14%
Strongly oppose.....	13%
Don’t know	6%
Refused.....	1%
TOTAL SUPPORT	67%
TOTAL OPPOSE	27%

15. Proposals to end debt-based driver's license suspensions for failing to appear in court for minor offenses and traffic violations.

Strongly support.....	37%
Somewhat support	27%
Somewhat oppose	17%
Strongly oppose.....	12%
Don't know	7%
Refused.....	<1%
TOTAL SUPPORT	64%
TOTAL OPPOSE	29%

16. Retroactively reinstating driver's licenses for individuals who have had their license revoked for failing to pay a court fine or appear in court.

Strongly support.....	37%
Somewhat support	33%
Somewhat oppose	13%
Strongly oppose.....	10%
Don't know	6%
Refused.....	1%
TOTAL SUPPORT	70%
TOTAL OPPOSE	23%

17. Automatically reinstating driver's licenses for individuals who have had their license revoked for failing to pay a court fine or appear in court, without them having to reapply for the license at the state department of motor vehicles or pay a fee.

Strongly support.....	39%
Somewhat support	28%
Somewhat oppose	15%
Strongly oppose.....	11%
Don't know	5%
Refused.....	1%
TOTAL SUPPORT	68%
TOTAL OPPOSE	26%

18. Requiring the state to notify individuals who have had their license revoked for failing to pay a court fine or appear in court that their license is being reinstated automatically?

Strongly support.....	50%
Somewhat support	28%
Somewhat oppose	9%
Strongly oppose.....	7%
Don't know	4%
Refused.....	1%
TOTAL SUPPORT	79%
TOTAL OPPOSE	16%

Thinking now about another topic...

Nearly one in four professions require an occupational or professional license, including plumbing, dentistry, nursing, cosmetology, law, and many others. Today, individuals in 30 states can be denied a license because of a previous criminal record.

19. Does your business require occupational or professional licensing to own or work for the business?

Yes	43%
No.....	55%
Not sure.....	3%

20. Does your business contract or work with another company that requires you and/or your employees for your business to have occupational or professional licensing?

Yes	41%
No.....	57%
Not sure.....	2%

Below are statements about occupational and professional licenses and state licensing boards. For each, indicate whether you agree or disagree with the statement.

21. License denials should be governed by specific guidelines and regulations pertinent to that industry, not broad or subjective guidelines such as the applicant’s “good moral character,” as is the case in some states and for some boards.

Strongly agree	39%
Somewhat agree	38%
Somewhat disagree	11%
Strongly disagree.....	4%
Don’t know	7%
Refused.....	2%
TOTAL AGREE	77%
TOTAL DISAGREE	15%

22. State licensing boards should consider the nature of the offense when deciding whether to deny a license, rather denying a license broadly for any felony conviction.

Strongly agree	51%
Somewhat agree	32%
Somewhat disagree	7%
Strongly disagree.....	5%
Don’t know	5%
Refused.....	1%
TOTAL AGREE	83%
TOTAL DISAGREE	12%

23. Licensing boards should consider the length of time since an offense was committed in its considerations.

Strongly agree	52%
Somewhat agree	34%
Somewhat disagree	6%
Strongly disagree.....	3%
Don't know	5%
Refused.....	1%
TOTAL AGREE	86%
TOTAL DISAGREE	9%

24. Business owners should have the ability to decide whether an employee's criminal history should preclude them from working for them, not a state licensing board.

Strongly agree	53%
Somewhat agree	29%
Somewhat disagree	10%
Strongly disagree.....	3%
Don't know	5%
Refused.....	1%
TOTAL AGREE	81%
TOTAL DISAGREE	14%

25. Licensing boards play an important role in public safety, protecting businesses from liability and ensuring a safe job candidate pool.

Strongly agree	36%
Somewhat agree	40%
Somewhat disagree	13%
Strongly disagree.....	4%
Don't know	7%
Refused.....	1%
TOTAL AGREE	76%
TOTAL DISAGREE	17%

26. As a business owner and thinking about the impact a change in the law would have on your ability to hire qualified individuals, would you support or oppose reforms that would allow people with criminal records fairer access to occupational licenses?

Strongly support.....	39%
Somewhat support	40%
Somewhat oppose	10%
Strongly oppose.....	5%
Don't know	7%
Refused.....	1%
TOTAL SUPPORT	79%
TOTAL OPPOSE	14%

Now, I have just a few questions for statistical purposes...

27. In what year were you born?

Before 1960	12%
1960 to 1969	17%
1970 to 1979	19%
1980 to 1989	30%
1990 to 2000	20%
After 2000	2%

28. Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, or Independent?

Republican	34%
Independent	32%
Democrat	25%
Other	5%
Don't know	2%
Refused	3%

29. Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or the Democratic Party? (If independent, other, or don't know - N=228)

Closer to the Democratic Party	21%
Closer to the Republican Party	32%
Neither	42%
Don't know	3%
Refused	2%

30. Which race do you identify with?

Asian / Asian American / East Asian / South Asian / Southeast Asian	3%
Black / African or African American	18%
Hispanic / Latino / Spanish origin	6%
Middle Eastern / North African	1%
Native American / Alaska Native	1%
Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	<1%
White / Caucasian	69%
Other	1%
Prefer not to answer	1%

31. Is your business located in a rural area, a suburban area, or an urban area?

Rural	27%
Suburban	42%
Urban	32%