 Click to Print

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) |

[Close](#)

[Home](#) » [News](#) » [Milwaukee County](#)

 [Milwaukee County](#)

[E-mail](#)



Eugene Kane | In My Opinion

In job search, ex-cons find questions linger

Posted: Jan. 7, 2009

AP News item - "Hoping to prevent convicts from being shut out of the work force, some major U.S. cities are eliminating questions from their job applications that ask whether prospective employees have ever been convicted of a crime."

When most people fill out a job application, the main concern usually is whether they can make themselves seem impressive enough to get the job. But when you have a criminal record, it's all about getting a fair shake when they know you've made a serious mistake.

In many ways, it's a leap of faith.

Ask any ex-con looking for work in Milwaukee, particularly African-American men with criminal

records that involve drug-dealing or other non-violent felonies. For many, their past mistakes continue to haunt them.

"I just can't catch a break!" is what one out-of-work convict once told me about his fruitless job search. He blamed his criminal record; once employers knew about it, he never heard from them again.

That's why it was intriguing to learn that several cities - including Chicago, Boston, Minneapolis, Baltimore and San Francisco - have eliminated questions about criminal records from job applications. The motivation for the new policy came out of a desire to aid convicts who feel shut out of the job market and reduce the likelihood they will commit new crimes.

In most cases, eliminating the question from the application didn't mean the city stopped doing background checks, particularly in sensitive areas involving working with children or public safety. But it acknowledges it's not necessary to inquire about criminal convictions for jobs that have nothing to do with a previous offense.

This strikes me as something Milwaukee should consider, particularly since this is a city where a 2003 study found that whites with criminal records were called back for possible jobs more often than African-Americans with no criminal record.

Milwaukee Employee Relations Director Maria Monteagudo said the city asks all applicants to list their misdemeanor and felony convictions on job applications but not municipal citations. She also cited a state law that forbids any discrimination against applicants because of previous arrests or convictions.

"It's illegal to use that against someone," she said.

Monteagudo said some people don't understand the failure to list a criminal record on applications can be used as a reason to remove them from job consideration. Even if they believe listing their record will be a negative factor, they are still required to provide the information or face being accused of lying about their background.

Monteagudo said she felt that eliminating the criminal record disclosure portion on job applications could benefit some ex-offenders but it could also raise false hopes for others. Some might not understand that providing false information might be the thing that killed their chances.

One of Milwaukee's most daunting problems is the underutilization of black men with criminal records in the work force. In some cases, a criminal record might be relevant, but there are plenty of jobs where having run afoul of the law in a previous life shouldn't be considered grounds for denial.

Paying your debt to society should mean just that, paid in full.

Contact Eugene Kane at (414)

223-5521 or

ekane@journalsentinel.com

[com](#). Read his *Raising Kane*

blog at

[www.jsonline.com/](http://www.jsonline.com/blogs/raisingkane)


[blogs/raisingkane](#)

Archives

- [Wealthy blacks will also need to be wise](#)
- [Beatings don't belong in good relationships](#)
- [No gray area in dialogue on corruption](#)
- [National love for Obama should only grow](#)
- [Are steroid users really poor sports?](#)
- [Role models today are close at hand](#)
- [Most know paying taxes is part of liberty](#)
- [Too bad Punxsutawney Phil can't predict what's really important](#)
- [Black History Month is special this year](#)
- [If it doesn't pass the smell test, don't do it](#)
- [There's no Zilber bullet for gun control](#)
- ['I swear I was there' claims could top Wilt's 100-point game](#)
- [Restoring driver's license is key to opening many doors](#)
- [For Obama, the real work starts now](#)
- [A King Day like no other](#)
- [Walker looking out for self, not Milwaukee County taxpayers](#)
- [Community must continue efforts against homicides this year](#)
- [Disrupted by troublesome bar, residents reclaim turf](#)
- [Burriss saga shows Milwaukee's political connections](#)
- [Black males must be taught to heal themselves](#)

Find this article at:

<http://www.jsonline.com/news/milwaukee/37248394.html>

 Click to Print

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.