Starting This Month, ‘Ban the Box’ Law Empowers the Men and Women We Serve

By Mike Bleeg

Starting November 18 this year, city government, many private employers and temporary hiring organizations with four or more employees can no longer ask the question, “DO YOU HAVE A CRIMINAL RECORD?” on their job application forms. This new “Ban the Box” law applies to private jobs and many government jobs in which the employee spends a majority of time in the City of Rochester. Private employers with jobs outside the city are not directly affected.

Under the law, Rochester employers can ask about a person’s criminal record only after an initial interview. Employers who do not conduct an initial interview must inform prospective job applicants about a background check, if they plan to conduct one before hiring.

The law prevents employers from screening out people with a criminal record before meeting them. It also requires employers to remove them as prospective employees only if their past offense relates to the position being filled. For example, financial institutions could remove a person convicted of stealing money from the list of applicants for a job as a bank teller. State law in New York has eight criteria to assess whether a person with a criminal record is eligible for a specific job.

Employers can ask questions related to job history, such as why there is a time gap in employment, during the initial interview. An applicant must be ready to answer such questions in a straightforward and truthful manner.

Organizations that hire for licensed trades or professions—such as hospitals and school districts hiring nurses or teachers—may ask about prior criminal convictions if such inquiry is required by a licensing authority, state law or federal law. The Rochester police and fire departments are also exempt, as are other employers hiring for “police officer” and “peace officer” positions.

People who believe a non-exempt employer has violated this law can bring a civil lawsuit against the employer. The City’s Corporation Counsel also has the authority commence a lawsuit. Brian Curran, Deputy Corporation Counsel, at 428-6810 is the contact at City Hall.

The law supports the mission of Spiritus Christi Prison Outreach and the people we serve in many ways:

• Empowering people with a criminal record to develop the skills they need to be a qualified employee, since only qualified candidates need to be considered.

• Encouraging employers to hire people based on their work qualifications, before any consideration of criminal history.

• Reducing recidivism and re-incarceration that can happen when people are unable to find a job.

• Fighting discrimination by helping employers to conform to existing New York State and Federal non-discrimination laws.

Sara’s Story

Sara S. (not her real name) is a Jennifer House resident who has painfully experienced the challenge of finding work after incarceration. Sara, who served time for a DWI conviction, has submitted multiple job applications that included the question
Sara believes that the new law will give her zero opportunities for a job interview.

Mike Bleeg is the retired coordinator of SMART regarding criminal record. She has received a chance to prove who she is and how she can help an employer, which will help her to become a productive member of society.

Sara said that she recognizes the need to research each job opportunity, especially the work and skill requirements relative to her capabilities. In a job interview, she will talk about how she can progress in jobs with more responsibilities, and how she can help the employer achieve company goals.

She recognizes that the person interviewing her can and will ask about the time gap in her employment history. She will be honest as to why the gap exists. “All I want is the chance to explain who I am now, how I am growing my life skills and why I know I can be a good employee,” Sara said.

Sara also knows that she could be asked whether she has a criminal record during the initial job interview. Even though this question violates the law, she will answer the question truthfully. She will be honest. She knows that the law does not allow a person to be denied a job unless the conviction is directly related to the job requirements.

Sara’s story is similar to those of many other people with a criminal record. Groups like Judicial Process Commission, Center for Employment Opportunity, Rochester-Works, and others can help them to develop a resume, practice job interviews and develop the skills needed to compete for available jobs. Often education diplomas and certificates are also needed. These groups will help link the individual to the appropriate education resources.

Mike Bleeg is the retired coordinator of SMART, the Safer Monroe Area Reentry Team, a collaboration of area organizations with a mission to enhance services for effective reentry from incarceration. He is also a former board member of Spiritus Christi Prison Outreach.
Thank You to Two Very Special Volunteers

Frank Staropoli with his wife, Sue

This renovation took three years of dedication and hard work. Frank was there every day, believing in the vision... The Prison Outreach is here and alive today, in large part because of Frank Staropoli's 30-plus years of faithful service and unconditional love.

“I know a little bit about carpentry, electrical, plumbing, painting and manual labor.”

Each Saturday a crew of volunteers and residents of Rogers House would come to the restaurant; ever so slowly, the building was gutted and transformed into something very beautiful for God. This renovation took three years of dedication and hard work. Frank was there every day, believing in the vision of this job-training center. He led the residents of Rogers House as they started each day with a prayer and heart-to-heart sharing. Lives were transformed as the Job Training Center began operation, long before the doors of the restaurant ever opened.

The fruits of this labor, and outpouring of love and dedication to the cause, were a tremendous success. For over 10 years, the Rogers House site served as a job-training center for men and women entering the community after incarceration.

Frank’s leadership and hands-on construction knowledge converted the Rogers House restaurant into a beautiful and successful eating establishment, with two apartments on the second floor. The restaurant, located at the corner of First Street and Central Park, remains open today under new ownership.

By the time the restaurant opened, Frank had fallen in love with the healing, transformative work of the Prison Outreach. He continued to visit the prison and lead community groups for the men. Frank made it very clear that his passion for the groups stemmed from recognition that he himself was in need of the healing of humanity that happens when people come together and share their hearts openly. Thirty years later, Frank was still co-facilitating a group at Nielsen House with Wanda and Ben.

We shed tears of gratitude as we celebrated Frank. The men expressed their thanks for his dedication and wisdom, along with his honest, non-judgmental feedback and insights. The Prison Outreach is here and alive today, in large part because of Frank Staropoli’s 30-plus years of faithful service and unconditional love.

Spiritus Christi Prison Outreach will be forever grateful to him for pouring his heart and soul into this precious ministry.

We love you Frank!

Jennifer House Wish List

Pillows/pillow cases
Comforters and sheet sets (twin size)
Towels (body and face)
Women’s socks, slippers, panties and bras
Winter hats, mittens, gloves and scarves

Women’s toiletries (soap, body wash, shampoo, conditioner, toothbrushes, toothpaste, etc.)
Walmart/Wegmans Gift Cards
Food and gifts for women

Journals/Pens/Pencils
Movies 10 Gift Cards
Umbrellas
Stove

For more information call 288-1074
Thank You to Two Special Volunteers con’t...

Steve LaSalle with his wife, Jennifer

“Steve has loved and cared for each member of our outreach and believed in each one with his heart and soul. Steve says that faith has guided his involvement—faith that each of the men he has counseled has infinite value and a positive future.”

Jim Smith
SCPO Executive Director

The song also exemplifies the way Steve has served our Prison Outreach. This fall, we pause to pay tribute to Steve and his countless contributions. After 17 years of volunteering and 8 years of active board leadership, Steve steps down as the president of the SCPO corporate board and chair of our advisory board. “I’m passing the torch, because it’s the right time for others to take over,” he told me.

Steve began volunteering for the SCPO in 1997. He became active after he and his friend Jennifer were touched by the stories they heard about the outreach at a mass. They signed up to volunteer immediately afterwards. Steve and Jennifer were married a year later, and the couple has leaned on each other, while others leaned on them, as they offered their time and talents to the outreach.

Steve raised his family in the Rochester area, where he was the Vice President of Finance for Nazareth College. He retired 10 years ago and has since shared his gifts of love, compassion, guidance, and leadership with the Prison Outreach and its participants.

Steve has seen a lot of change and growth in the outreach and its programs over the years. He was a member of the original advisory board. He also helped to raise funds to start Jennifer House and Nielsen House. He’s seen the addition of talented and professional staff, and contributed to the establishment of a more sophisticated management and oversight structure for SCPO, including formation of the board and committees in place today. These organizational structures provide the foundation and framework for managing a vision of growth for the outreach, while staying true to its mission of service towards the men and women we serve.

Steve initiated the first State of the Heart Newsletter 6 years ago, as a way to communicate the work of the outreach and success of the men and women we serve. The newsletter was a simple black and white communication and has evolved to the digital format it is today. It has grown to become an educational and advocacy newsletter that reaches beyond the church and into the community.

Steve also has been an active organizer and fund raiser for the annual gala. He organized the annual auction and generously donated his time and personal assets to help raise money for the outreach.

Steve’s hope for the future is that the outreach continues slow and sustained growth, with more programs to assist people who have been incarcerated beyond the houses. There are opportunities to assist the homeless, establish new residences, and put programs in place that help residents and non-residents with education and job opportunities. He also believes the outreach will need to prepare for the impact of evolving politics and a redefinition of what it means to be homeless.

Steve plans to continue his involvement by participating in prisoner visits and group activities, continuing to be involved in outreach finances and as board secretary, and as an overall ambassador for SCPO.

Although Steve is recognized for his resourcefulness and business acumen, his legacy is really defined by his love, compassion, and faith in the men and women that he helped.

Jim Smith, Executive Director, says “Steve has loved and cared for each member of our outreach and believed in each one with his heart and soul.”

Steve says that faith has guided his involvement—faith that each of the men he has counseled has infinite value and a positive future. Steve knew the journey they were on was difficult and would be faced with challenges. But he also let them lean on him any time they needed him. For this, and for all that you have done for SCPO, we thank you Steve!
Jennifer House is pleased to welcome Mattie Marsh, who recently joined our staff as a part-time case manager. Funded through the generosity of Spiritus Christi Prison Outreach donors, this new position expands our ability to serve residents and allows Jennifer House Director Dellenna Harper to focus on other aspects of her job.

Mattie helps residents make the adjustment from incarceration to becoming part of the Jennifer House community. She provides the support each woman needs to identify life challenges, obtain needed services and fulfill her personalized plan for the journey to self-sufficiency and permanent housing.

The residents Mattie serves are enjoying new floors at Jennifer House—a much-needed improvement that makes the house more attractive, warm and comfortable. Discover Hardwood Flooring and Design LLC donated the refinishing work in the dining room. Work on the second floor is complete, and the stairs are scheduled to be updated in time for Christmas. All of this was made possible by your support. Thank you!

As the SCPO Advisory Board thanked Steve LaSalle for his years of service, we were pleased that Kathleen Tranelli accepted our unanimous vote of confidence to serve as the new board chair.

Kathleen brings a sharp legal mind to the leadership role, having served as a vice president of Kodak’s legal division, and lead legal counsel for several business units over 20 years. Professionally she now works as a legal consultant, serving clients who benefit from her 25 years of experience in intellectual property, e-commerce, and privacy compliance law.

Spiritus Christi Prison Outreach benefits from Kathleen’s strong intellect, boundless energy and deep commitment to our mission. She began her service five years ago, joining a group that visited women at Albion Correctional Facility. She joined the SCPO Advisory Board in 2010, editing the newsletter for three years and leading the newly formed Development Committee for two before becoming Chair.

“I am passionate about the life-changing work of the Outreach. I look forward to leading the Board as we develop and implement the next five-year Strategic Plan with staff,” Kathleen said. (We’ll be sharing more about that in a future newsletter.) “We have such a talented Board and staff, and I’m confident we will meet the challenges and opportunities ahead, with God’s grace.”

Please join Kathleen’s fellow Board members in thanking her for past, present, and future service to our wonderful organization.

Lawyer, Volunteer, New Board Chair— Welcoming Kathleen Tranelli

By Chip Partner

Gratitude for Grants:

The Prison Outreach is grateful for the following grants received or awarded thus far in 2014:

Public

City Of Rochester
Monroe County Department of Human Resources
New York State Office of Temporary Disability
U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development

Private

Daisy Marquis Jones-Family Reunification Program
$15,000
Rochester Area Community Foundation/Robert Campbell
$500
Sperandio Family Foundation-Family Reunification
$2,500
Women’s Club of Pittsford-Women's Empowerment
$500
Apple Matching Gifts Program-Jennifer House
$8,855
Rochester Area Community Foundation/Women’s Giving Circle
Women’s Empowerment
$7,000
The M&T Charitable Foundation - Family Reunification
$1,000
Women’s Foundation of Genesee Valley
$10,000

Your Donations At Work: Meet Mattie Marsh!

Jennifer House is pleased to welcome Mattie Marsh, who recently joined our staff as a part-time case manager. Funded through the generosity of Spiritus Christi Prison Outreach donors, this new position expands our ability to serve residents and allows Jennifer House Director Dellenna Harper to focus on other aspects of her job.

Mattie helps residents make the adjustment from incarceration to becoming part of the Jennifer House community. She provides the support each woman needs to identify life challenges, obtain needed services and fulfill her personalized plan for the journey to self-sufficiency and permanent housing.

The residents Mattie serves are enjoying new floors at Jennifer House—a much-needed improvement that makes the house more attractive, warm and comfortable. Discover Hardwood Flooring and Design LLC donated the refinishing work in the dining room. Work on the second floor is complete, and the stairs are scheduled to be updated in time for Christmas. All of this was made possible by your support. Thank you!
This autumn, the women of Jennifer House continue to amaze me. As I sit back and watch the women struggle, persevere, transform and blossom before my very eyes, I am affirmed that the work we do here is truly the work of God. The women who have come through this house are miracles; they are all a blessing not only to themselves, but to the lives of those with whom they come in contact.

I think I speak for all the staff when I say that we have learned an abundance of valuable life lessons from the women and continue to do so after they leave. The individuals and families who contribute to the well-being of the women at Jennifer House have also been touched by the women’s stories and experiences. That continues to be reflected in the great amount of love that is showered on this house.

As a direct result of that love, the women have had the opportunity to participate in many recreational and social activities which are critical to their individual recovery. This past summer, many have participated in local events—such as plays put on by neighborhood organizations, local comedy shows, ceramics classes where they painted beautiful pottery, Red Wings baseball games, and also a softball event. Our residents were excited and proud to be asked to participate in the “Stop the Trafficking, End the Cycle” run and walk, as many of the women we serve have experienced human trafficking firsthand. This event was sponsored by the Angels of Mercy, which is a clothing store that our women can go to and obtain free clothing for job searching interviews. They really felt empowered being a part of that event. They also participated in the “Make Every Woman and Girl Count” 5K race and walk in late October. This event is sponsored by the Women’s Foundation, one of our consistent and dedicated supporters.

Although they do have fun, our women also struggle on a daily basis. They work hard to stay clean and sober, to change negative attitudes and behaviors, to reconnect with their children and families, and to adjust back into the community. Not all of the women who come to Jennifer House succeed the first time, or maybe even the second. Nevertheless a seed is still planted. They know that when they are ready to do something different and have a desire to get their lives back in order, we are always here to support and walk with them on their journey.

Jessica Holtz is one young lady who comes to mind. Jessica resided here for the first time in 2012. She was pregnant with her daughter, Jazzlyn, at the time. She made the decision to leave the house and returned to us in 2014 from jail. She was an active participant in the jail group, attending on a weekly basis. During her stay with us, she worked hard on dealing with the death of her mother, which she had never faced before because of her use of drugs. Jessica succeeded in working with Child Protective Services to get her daughter back from foster care. During her second stay at Jennifer House, Jessica went from no visits with her daughter, to supervised visits, and then progressed to visits with no supervision. She did everything necessary to get her daughter back into her life.

Jessica worked hard in many other areas of her life for the duration of her stay here. She was able to complete a parenting class, work on her spelling and vocabulary, as well as obtain life skills like washing clothes, doing her chores, keeping organized by utilizing her planner, and cooking. Jessica learned that she loves to cook, and has looked into attending the culinary school at Rochester Education Opportunity Center, REOC, to pursue cooking as a career. She stayed at Jennifer House for six months before moving into the family program through East House, so she and her daughter could live together. She continues to be a part of the Jennifer House community by blessing us with her presence on Tuesdays; she even came and cooked dinner for the ladies here. Jessica Holtz is a prime example of one of the many miracles that God has blessed us with.
Nielsen House News

By Wanda Johnson, Director

Hello all! The summer is over and we are preparing to fall into the winter season and the fun that comes with it. We are kicking off the season with a trip to Darien Lake theme park for “Fright Night.” The kid in all of us is ready to have fun and be frightened—I know I am! I’m so afraid of scary stuff, but I know it’s healthy to face my fears.

One of the men at Nielsen House said, “Who’s going to Darien Lake?” I replied, “We are!” With a frown on his face, he said “Oh no.” I replied, “Don’t you want to have fun?” He said, “It’s been years since I went anywhere to have fun. I have been homeless and using drugs for so long that I forgot how to have fun.” I told him that he and I were going to have a great time together, and he smiled. End of story. Moments like these are the most memorable part of working here. We will take pictures and share in our next newsletter.

We have had two student interns doing their field work at Nielsen House. Darryl Brown is in a Bachelors Program at SUNY Brockport, and Jamielle Crocket is a student at Monroe Community College. Both are studying to become social workers, and it’s been a pleasure having them around.

Things have been going great at Nielsen House. We remain full to capacity. We had two alumni graduate from Rochester Drug Court in October. One is Joshua D., who spoke at one of the Spiritus masses in March; the other is Raul T. Joshua is enrolled in classes at MCC Applied Technologies on West Henrietta Road. Raul has a job and lives at Pathways Housing. We have at least seven alumni who are enrolled at Monroe Community College—and so am I! Hooray for all of us. I love seeing the men on campus as we learn and better ourselves together. Another of our alumni, Dan P., welcomed the birth of a son, Dominic P. Dan has four daughters so you can imagine the joy he has with a son in the house. Both mom and child are doing well.

We recently had a dinner to say farewell to a good friend of Nielsen house—Frank Staropoli, who is celebrated in an article by Jim Smith in this newsletter. Frank has helped me to facilitate the Tuesday night State of the Heart meeting since the birth of Nielsen House. We started the group in the house long before it was open to our first residents. Reverend Mary, Jim and Julie Smith, Frank and his wife, Sue, along with many of our alumni attended that dinner. It was really touching as alumni after alumni shared of their experience and love for Frank and what he has brought into each of their lives. It was a swell time.

This past summer, we had a parishioner come over with her children for dinner. Her son Jack had been at the house with a youth group and left quite an impression on the men. Jack was bright and very articulate. He was very relaxed among the men, and they appreciated that. So now, Jack has a fan base here at the Nielsen House. We hope that he is doing well. We also received the gift of a couch, just in time for football season! Spiritus Christi is full of wonderful people, and we really appreciate all of your kindness. We are in the thralls of planning for Turkey Day! With so many men in the house we just know it’s going to be like no other Thanksgiving before. Happy fall to all of you.

Resident Reflection

By Jason Branch, Nielsen House resident

Home here at Nielsen House is a wonderful place. It reminds me of my home before I came here. I have grown to fit in here so well. We do all things as if we were at our own homes.

The thing I like best is dinner. I have a new family here. We have our ups and downs, but we pull together to help each other with our struggles. I have grown so much here—I see it myself, and others do too. The guys look up to me, and come to me for advice. That makes me feel like a part of something.

On November 5, 2014, I will have been here for one year. That time went by so fast! I think that is because I did what Mrs. Wanda put in my program. She has been patient with me, as well as tough. She has been a big part of my growth and stay here at Nielsen House.

I have a daughter. She is eight years old, and she means so much to me. When I think about her, I just smile because I can’t believe how much she has grown. She is in the third grade and is doing so well in school. I’m so proud of her.

My daughter stays with me at Nielsen House on the weekends. Mrs. Wanda makes it possible for us to spend time together. We do a lot together—like go to the movies, the zoo, museums, and much more.

After I leave Nielsen House, I will return to show the people who come after I have gone that, if you want to change your life, you can do it—just as Nielsen House has helped me to change mine. This will always be home to me. I will always be grateful for Mrs. Wanda and the staff here. Thank you.

I have a new family here. We have our ups and downs, but we pull together to help each other with our struggles.
# SCPO Board of Advisors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position/Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Velma B. Campbell</td>
<td>Adjunct Professor of Social Work, Greater Rochester Collaborative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharon Castronovo</td>
<td>Grants/Office Manager, Spiritus Christi Prison Outreach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleanor Coleman</td>
<td>ProsperRochester, Inc. &amp; Office of Adult Career Education Services (OACES)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim Dillon</td>
<td>Professional Life and Career Coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dellenna Harper</td>
<td>Jennifer House Director, Alumna of Jennifer House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germaine Knapp</td>
<td>President, Sojourner House (Retired)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen LaSalle [Emeritus]</td>
<td>Vice President – Finance, Nazareth College (Retired)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson Leenhouts</td>
<td>Chairman &amp; CEO, Home Leasing Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James McCauley Jr.</td>
<td>Director of Operations, Camp Good Days and Special Times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan Monahan, Ph.D.</td>
<td>Senior VP, Xerox Corp (Retired)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chip Partner</td>
<td>Chief Communications Officer, Rochester City School District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward Nowak, Esq.</td>
<td>Monroe County (NY) Public Defender (Retired)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Todd Schirmer</td>
<td>Vice President, Northwest Savings Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Smith LMSW;CASAC</td>
<td>Executive Director, Spiritus Christi Prison Outreach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathleen Tranelli, Esq.</td>
<td>Vice President, Legal Division, Eastman Kodak Co. (Retired)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsletter Editorial Team</td>
<td>Chip Partner, Corinne Stukas, Kathleen Tranelli, Jim Smith</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Donate Online**

We have enabled online donations through PayPal or credit card, on a new website. Please visit: [http://spirituschristiprisonoutreach.org/](http://spirituschristiprisonoutreach.org/) and click the “Contribute” tab at top.

**Want A Speaker?**

Are you looking for a speaker for your club, church or community group? Do you know of another church or community group who might want to learn about the Prison Outreach or support its work?

We have dynamic speakers who are anxious to tell the community about the great work the Outreach is doing to help people with a criminal record transform their lives. The stories are compelling and the reduced recidivism statistics are impressive.

All we need is a name and contact information; we’ll handle the rest. Contact Jim Smith at 288-0504 for details or to schedule a speaker.