

Dear _____

As our national and state economic troubles persist, I would like to draw your attention to an issue of economic importance to Rhode Island. I write to you as a practicing attorney and as President of the Rhode Island Center for Law and Public Policy in order to tell the extraordinary story about my client and friend, Kent, who has been barred from contributing to Rhode Island's economic growth because of outdated policies.

Kent originally came to me as a client seeking to cut through government red tape that was preventing him from properly taking care of his family. Kent is an excellent citizen. He went to college and graduated with honors. He is married and the father of three children. Today, he works for a non-profit agency, where he spends his days coordinating programs to help men serve as role models and mentors to young men in their communities.

Kent recognized that non-profits can easily lose funding and go under on short notice. Therefore, he applied for a chauffeur's license to provide another source of income for his family's security. Kent was shocked to learn that his application was denied because of a fifteen-year old criminal record.

To the State of Rhode Island, Kent's accomplishments are irrelevant because of his criminal record. What the State does not learn about through his criminal record is the history of Kent's battle with a severe substance abuse problem.

As a young man, Kent he drank to escape the realities of his life – the reality of a dead-end job, of corrosive relationships, and the reality that his life was spiraling out of control. Kent's drinking led to the inevitable trouble with the law. He was arrested and convicted of six misdemeanors over a five-year period. Kent continued to drink in spite of the convictions, because he was not receiving the help he needed.

Luckily, Kent received much needed support from his family and friends. Sixteen years ago, Kent began the work to reclaim his life. With the help of substance abuse counselors, Kent cleaned up, went to college and graduated with honors. Ten years ago, he received approval from the Department of Children, Youth and Families to serve needy children and families in multiple non-profit agencies.

By any standards, Kent's story of transformation is a success story that should be applauded and honored. Kent worked against the odds to recover his life and now contributes meaningfully to our society. However, Kent and many others like him are being held back from making their full contribution to our economy and the overall well-being of our state.

If you think that it is absurd that a person like Kent, who rebuilt a life and is a positive force in his community and our state, was refused such a simple request you are not alone. Nor is Kent. There are thousands of "Kents" in Rhode Island, each trying their

best to rebuild their lives and just need a little support to do so. Yet, their disabilities, continue to remove opportunities for self-sufficiency and employment.

We tell those who have fallen due to any number of addictions to get back up. We tell them that we, as a society, want them to live good and productive lives. It's good for them and it's good for all of us. However, we place often insurmountable barriers that prevent their full re-entry into society.

The Rhode Island Center For Law And Public Policy represents Kent and advocates for the other "Kents" in our community. In an effort to develop and implement sound and effective policies and programs that not only will aid those who are prevented from re-entering society but also will also be cost effective in these austere times, I ask that you take time to answer the enclosed brief survey.

The Center intends to compile the responses and to publish them. We will release the results to the statewide and local media, as well as submit them to local web sites throughout the state. It will be noted who participated and who did not.

As an aspiring public official, or as a returning incumbent, you have a responsibility to think about these issues and make your views publicly known. There will be an opportunity for you to give a nuanced answer.

As a result of your participation, the Center will be in a position to develop and propose sensible and responsible proposals to address these issues. Our purpose is to develop a scheme that will help those trying to help themselves and to reward efforts that contribute to the well-being of our communities.

On behalf of the Rhode Island Center For Law And Public Policy, I look forward to your responses and thank you for the time taken to complete this survey.

Best regards,

Geoffrey A. Schoos, Esq.
President
Rhode Island Center For Law And Public Policy