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# Orange County to 'ban the box' asking job applicants about past criminal convictions

By GRACE TOOHEY  
ORLANDO SENTINEL | SEP 10, 2021



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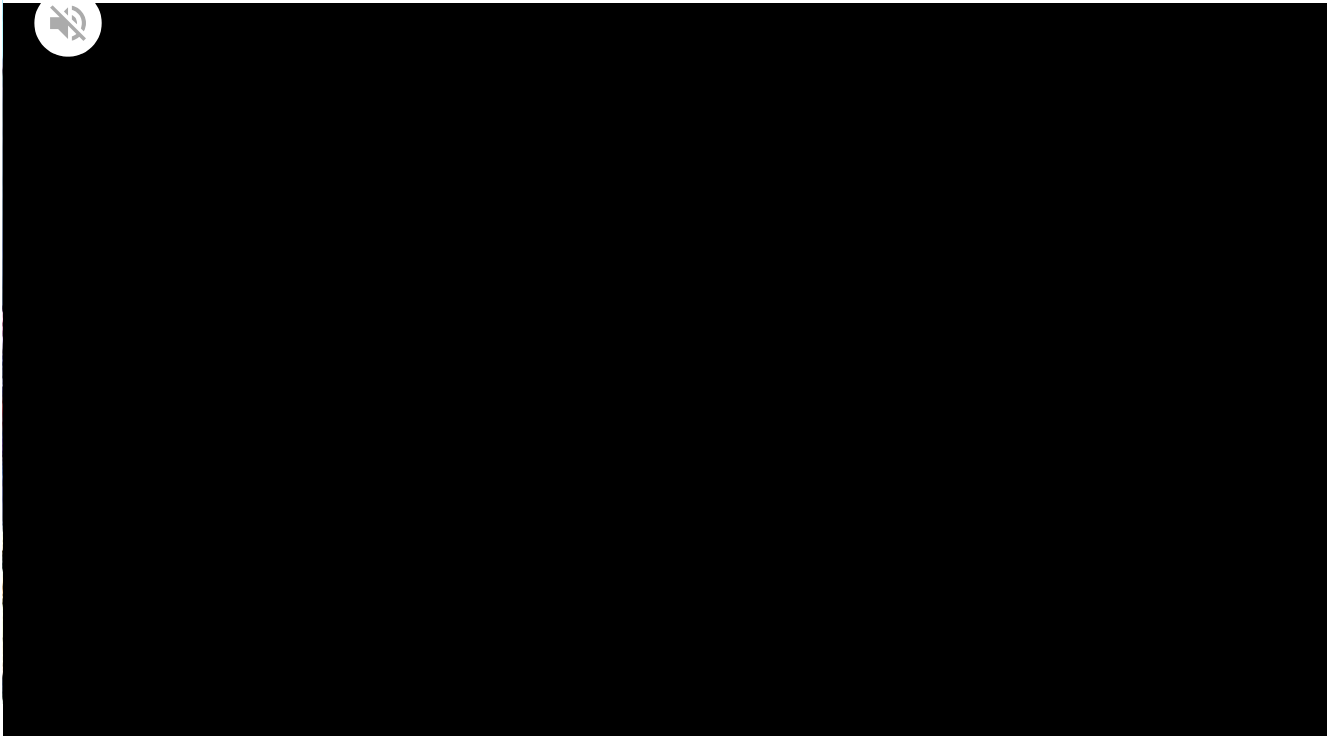
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People applying for a job with the Orange County government will no longer have to disclose prior criminal convictions at the beginning of the application process, a move officials and advocates hope will improve access to employment for those with a criminal record, Human Resources Director Ricardo Daye announced Friday.

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“A lot of viable candidates might be deterred to even apply for positions with the county, just because they got to answer that question,” Daye said. “We want to make sure there’s no barrier for people who want to work.”

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The policy change was revealed [at a press conference](#) marking the county's second annual "Desmond Meade Day," honoring Meade's work in the community helping restore the right to vote for Floridians with prior felony convictions.

Meade, the executive director of the Orlando-based Florida Rights Restoration Coalition, which spearheaded the [2018 amendment that voters overwhelmingly approved to give people with prior felony convictions the right to vote](#) praised Dave and Orange County Mayor Jerry Demings'

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That's the name of [a national campaign](#) aimed at improving employment opportunities for people who were formerly incarcerated or have prior criminal convictions. Local governments across the nation have in recent years eliminated such questions on job applications, including the city of Orlando in 2015.

"I definitely want to commend Mayor Demings on the swiftness of how he's moving on this policy," said Meade, who previously was incarcerated in Florida.

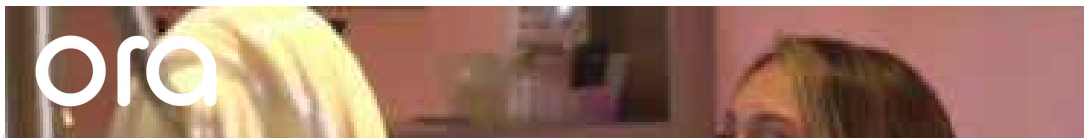
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FRRC's Deputy Director Neil Volz, who has also completed his sentence for a felony conviction, said removing the question about criminal history on job applications eliminates a "huge hurdle." He said it has taken him weeks to get a job interview because of that question.

"The process of taking that off of the employment screening process is a huge deal, because you get an opportunity to actually share a little bit about your qualifications and what you do," Volz said. "For me, getting a job changed my life."

Daye said the county is in the process of revamping its application process to eliminate that question for most jobs and hopes to have the new policy implemented in early October. The question will not be eliminated for certain public safety positions, like corrections officers or firefighters, county spokesperson Despina McLaughlin said.

"Orange County government is a very large employer," Daye said. "We want to make sure we are giving every citizen the opportunity to participate in our process."

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He said the county is proud to partner with Meade and FRRC to improve access to jobs, noting that the county is **currently hiring for many positions**, including at the convention center and in the public works department. Orange County employs more than 8,000 people.

Banning the box will allow the county to focus on someone's qualifications and skills, Daye said, but there will still be a background check completed after a job

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“We see this as an opportunity to expand our pool of applicants,” Daye said.

The change coming to Orange County’s hiring process supports FRRC’s new statewide campaign focusing on employment opportunities for returning citizens, or people who recently completed prison sentences, Volz said.

“Second chance employment is important because it’s a win for everybody,” Volz said, noting it helps businesses or governments fill positions, helps returning citizens find gainful and dignified employment and helps reduce crime, because people with jobs are less likely to re-offend.

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Desmond Meade, a voting rights advocate, talks to a large crowd during the Souls to the Polls event in downtown

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challenged everyone in the community to ...  
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“I could not have gotten here without community. I could not have gotten here without the actions of nonprofits, the action of community advocates, the actions of county governments in helping me change my life around,” Meade said. “... I think its only fitting the two things we highlight on Desmond Meade Day are second chances and community service.”

FRRC members and volunteers planned to spend Friday delivering food and hygiene supplies to homeless and in-need populations across Central Florida.

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“Be open and receptive of second chances,” Meade said. “If we want the city of Orlando, if we want ... Orange County to be a stronger, greater, more thriving place to live, then we must do all we can to all we can to empower those pushed to the fringe of our society.”

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