

Assembly Bill No. 1008

CHAPTER 789

An act to add Section 12952 to the Government Code, and to repeal Section 432.9 of the Labor Code, relating to employment discrimination.

[Approved by Governor October 14, 2017. Filed with
Secretary of State October 14, 2017.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 1008, McCarty. Employment discrimination: conviction history.

Existing law, the California Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA), prohibits an employer from engaging in various defined forms of discriminatory employment practices.

Existing law prohibits an employer, whether a public agency or private individual or corporation, from asking an applicant for employment to disclose, or from utilizing as a factor in determining any condition of employment, information concerning an arrest or detention that did not result in a conviction, or information concerning a referral or participation in, any pretrial or posttrial diversion program, except as specified. Existing law also prohibits a state or local agency from asking an applicant for employment to disclose information regarding a criminal conviction, except as specified, until the agency has determined the applicant meets the minimum employment qualifications for the position.

This bill would repeal the prohibition on a state or local agency from asking an applicant for employment to disclose information regarding a criminal conviction, as described above. The bill would, instead, provide it is an unlawful employment practice under FEHA for an employer with 5 or more employees to include on any application for employment any question that seeks the disclosure of an applicant's conviction history, to inquire into or consider the conviction history of an applicant until that applicant has received a conditional offer, and, when conducting a conviction history background check, to consider, distribute, or disseminate information related to specified prior arrests, diversions, and convictions.

This bill would also require an employer who intends to deny an applicant a position of employment solely or in part because of the applicant's conviction history to make an individualized assessment of whether the applicant's conviction history has a direct and adverse relationship with the specific duties of the job, and to consider certain topics when making that assessment. The bill would require an employer who makes a preliminary decision to deny employment based on that individualized assessment to provide the applicant written notification of the decision. The bill would require the notification to contain specified information. The bill would grant an applicant 5 business days to respond to that notification before the

employer may make a final decision. If the applicant notifies the employer in writing that he or she disputes the accuracy of the conviction history and is obtaining evidence to support that assertion, the bill would grant the applicant an additional 5 business days to respond to the notice. The bill would require an employer to consider information submitted by the applicant before making a final decision. The bill would require an employer who has made a final decision to deny employment to the applicant to notify the applicant in writing of specified topics. The bill would exempt specified positions of employment from the provisions of the bill.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:

(a) In 2013, the State of California passed historic legislation to reduce barriers to employment for people with conviction histories, and to decrease unemployment in communities with concentrated numbers of people with conviction histories, recognizing that these barriers are matters of statewide concern. The Ban the Box law passed in 2013 applied to state agencies, all cities and counties, including charter cities and charter counties, and special districts.

(b) In 2015, President Obama directed all federal agencies to “Ban the Box” and refrain from asking applicants about their convictions on the initial job application.

(c) Nationwide, 29 states and over 150 cities and counties have adopted a “Ban the Box” law, and over 300 companies have signed the White House Fair Chance hiring pledge.

(d) Nine states and 15 major cities, including Los Angeles and San Francisco, have adopted fair chance hiring laws that cover both public and private sector employers. Over 20 percent of the United States population now lives in a state or locality that prohibits private employers from inquiring into an applicant’s record at the start of the hiring process.

(e) Since 2013, when Assembly Bill 218 was signed into law, five states have adopted fair chance hiring laws that cover private employers, Connecticut, Illinois, New Jersey, Oregon, and Vermont, as well as several major cities, including Baltimore, New York City, Philadelphia, and Austin, Texas.

(f) Roughly seven million Californians, or nearly one in three adults, have an arrest or conviction record that can significantly undermine their efforts to obtain gainful employment.

(g) Experts have found that employment is essential to helping formerly incarcerated people support themselves and their families, that a job develops prosocial behavior, strengthens community ties, enhances self-esteem, and improves mental health, all of which reduce recidivism. These effects are strengthened the longer the person holds the job, and especially when it pays more than minimum wage.

(h) Experts have found that people with conviction records have lower rates of turnover and higher rates of promotion on the job and that the personal contact with potential employees can reduce the negative stigma of a conviction by approximately 15 percent.

SEC. 2. Section 12952 is added to the Government Code, to read:

12952. (a) Except as provided in subdivision (d), it is an unlawful employment practice for an employer with five or more employees to do any of the following:

(1) To include on any application for employment, before the employer makes a conditional offer of employment to the applicant, any question that seeks the disclosure of an applicant's conviction history.

(2) To inquire into or consider the conviction history of the applicant, including any inquiry about conviction history on any employment application, until after the employer has made a conditional offer of employment to the applicant.

(3) To consider, distribute, or disseminate information about any of the following while conducting a conviction history background check in connection with any application for employment:

(A) Arrest not followed by conviction, except in the circumstances as permitted in paragraph (1) of subdivision (a) and subdivision (f) of Section 432.7 of the Labor Code.

(B) Referral to or participation in a pretrial or posttrial diversion program.

(C) Convictions that have been sealed, dismissed, expunged, or statutorily eradicated pursuant to law.

(4) To interfere with, restrain, or deny the exercise of, or the attempt to exercise, any right provided under this section.

(b) This section shall not be construed to prevent an employer from conducting a conviction history background check not in conflict with the provisions of subdivision (a).

(c) (1) (A) An employer that intends to deny an applicant a position of employment solely or in part because of the applicant's conviction history shall make an individualized assessment of whether the applicant's conviction history has a direct and adverse relationship with the specific duties of the job that justify denying the applicant the position. In making the assessment described in this paragraph, the employer shall consider all of the following:

(i) The nature and gravity of the offense or conduct.

(ii) The time that has passed since the offense or conduct and completion of the sentence.

(iii) The nature of the job held or sought.

(B) An employer may, but is not required to, commit the results of this individualized assessment to writing.

(2) If the employer makes a preliminary decision that the applicant's conviction history disqualifies the applicant from employment, the employer shall notify the applicant of this preliminary decision in writing. That notification may, but is not required to, justify or explain the employer's

reasoning for making the preliminary decision. The notification shall contain all of the following:

(A) Notice of the disqualifying conviction or convictions that are the basis for the preliminary decision to rescind the offer.

(B) A copy of the conviction history report, if any.

(C) An explanation of the applicant's right to respond to the notice of the employer's preliminary decision before that decision becomes final and the deadline by which to respond. The explanation shall inform the applicant that the response may include submission of evidence challenging the accuracy of the conviction history report that is the basis for rescinding the offer, evidence of rehabilitation or mitigating circumstances, or both.

(3) The applicant shall have at least five business days to respond to the notice provided to the applicant under paragraph (2) before the employer may make a final decision. If, within the five business days, the applicant notifies the employer in writing that the applicant disputes the accuracy of the conviction history report that was the basis for the preliminary decision to rescind the offer and that the applicant is taking specific steps to obtain evidence supporting that assertion, then the applicant shall have five additional business days to respond to the notice.

(4) The employer shall consider information submitted by the applicant pursuant to paragraph (3) before making a final decision.

(5) If an employer makes a final decision to deny an application solely or in part because of the applicant's conviction history, the employer shall notify the applicant in writing of all the following:

(A) The final denial or disqualification. The employer may, but is not required to, justify or explain the employer's reasoning for making the final denial or disqualification.

(B) Any existing procedure the employer has for the applicant to challenge the decision or request reconsideration.

(C) The right to file a complaint with the department.

(d) This section does not apply in any of the following circumstances:

(1) To a position for which a state or local agency is otherwise required by law to conduct a conviction history background check.

(2) To a position with a criminal justice agency, as defined in Section 13101 of the Penal Code.

(3) To a position as a Farm Labor Contractor, as described in Section 1685 of the Labor Code.

(4) To a position where an employer or agent thereof is required by any state, federal, or local law to conduct criminal background checks for employment purposes or to restrict employment based on criminal history. For purposes of this paragraph, federal law shall include rules or regulations promulgated by a self-regulatory organization as defined in Section 3(a)(26) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, as amended by 124 Stat. 1652 (Public Law 111-203), pursuant to the authority in Section 19(b) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, as amended by 124 Stat. 1652 (Public Law 111-203).

(e) The remedies under this section shall be in addition to and not in derogation of all other rights and remedies that an applicant may have under any other law, including any local ordinance.

(f) For purposes of this section:

(1) “Conviction” has the same meaning as defined in paragraphs (1) and (3) of subdivision (a) of Section 432.7 of the Labor Code.

(2) Notwithstanding paragraph (1), the term “conviction history” includes:

(A) An arrest not resulting in conviction only in the specific, limited circumstances described in subdivision (f) of Section 432.7 of the Labor Code, when an employer at a health facility, as defined in Section 1250 of the Health and Safety Code, may ask an applicant for certain positions about specified types of arrests.

(B) An arrest for which an individual is out on bail or his or her own recognizance pending trial.

SEC. 3. Section 432.9 of the Labor Code is repealed.