

B.R.2021-4

CALLING UPON THE UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH TO SUPPORT APPLICANTS WITH
CRIMINAL HISTORIES IN THE UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS PROCESS

STUDENT GOVERNMENT BOARD UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

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CO-SPONSORED BY: Executive Vice President Cedric Humphrey, Vice President and Chief of Finance Ben King,
Vice President and Chief of Cabinet Tyler Viljaste, Board Member Kathryn Fleisher, Board Member Victoria
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30 MARCH 2021

Board Member Annalise Abraham introduced the following resolution; which was read for the first
time.

A RESOLUTION

SUPPORTING APPLICANTS WITH CRIMINAL HISTORIES IN THE UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS
PROCESS

1 WHEREAS, the University of Pittsburgh asks on its undergraduate admissions
2 application¹, “Have you ever been convicted of a felony, or convicted of any
3 crime involving sexual offences or drug distribution, sale, or manufacture?”;
4 and,

5 WHEREAS, requiring applicants to reveal their criminal history on college
6 admissions applications discourages those with criminal records from
7 completing the application;² and,

8 WHEREAS, young Black people and people of color are disproportionately
9 criminalized; therefore, admissions policies that inquire about criminal
10 convictions have a disparate impact on their access to higher education; and,

11 WHEREAS, asking criminal record questions during the admissions process
12 reduces higher education access to the 30% of Americans who have a criminal
13 record;³ and,

14 WHEREAS, the Ban the Box campaign⁴ was started by All of Us or None, a
15 national civil rights movement run by formerly incarcerated people and their
16 families. The organization urges employers to “ban the box” by removing
17 questions about criminal history from job applications and instead assess
18 candidates solely based on their qualifications. The scope of this movement

¹ <https://www.pennlive.com/news/2020/02/do-questions-about-criminal-records-belong-on-pa-college-applications.html>

² https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Laying-the-Groundwork_Feb2020.pdf

³ <https://www.ncsl.org/research/labor-and-employment/barriers-to-work-individuals-with-criminal-records.aspx>

⁴ <http://bantheboxcampaign.org/about/#.YFdUAbRKjLY>

19 has broadened to include other aspects of life within which conviction history
20 plays a role, such as college admissions; and,

21 WHEREAS, at the University of Pittsburgh’s 2020 Diversity Forum, Dr. Angela
22 Davis spoke about the need for Ban the Box reforms and the role that
23 universities must play in making higher education more accessible and
24 equitable; and,

25 WHEREAS, “most criminalized harms are rooted in social and economic
26 inequities,”⁵ causing marginalized communities who face such inequities to
27 have more interactions with the criminal justice system; and,

28 WHEREAS, gaining a college education is highly beneficial to people with criminal
29 records, since it makes them more competitive candidates to employers who
30 might be reluctant to hire them otherwise; and,

31 WHEREAS, college education has been shown to dramatically reduce recidivism
32 rates;⁶ and,

33 WHEREAS, the University of Pittsburgh has removed initial questions about
34 criminal history from staff employment applications;⁷ and,

35 WHEREAS, the University of Pittsburgh has an obligation to ensure the safety of
36 its students and campus community; and,

⁵ Mariame Kaba, *We Do This ‘Til We Free Us* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2021), 24.

⁶ <http://www.communityalternatives.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/use-of-criminal-history-records-reconsidered.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.hr.pitt.edu/projects/improvements-applicant-background-check-process>

37 WHEREAS, “there is no statistically significant difference in the rate of campus
38 crime between institutions of higher education that explore undergraduate
39 applicants’ disciplinary background and those that do not”;⁶ therefore,
40 campus safety need not be a concern in deciding to ban the box from the
41 University’s admissions applications; and,
42 WHEREAS, half of all American public universities ask about criminal history in
43 some regard on their admissions applications;² and,
44 WHEREAS, the Common App removed criminal history questions from its general
45 application in 2019;⁸ and,
46 WHEREAS, Maryland, Louisiana, Washington, Colorado and California have laws
47 that restrict public universities from asking criminal history questions during
48 admissions processes;⁹ and,
49 WHEREAS, the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE), which
50 oversees 14 state-owned colleges and universities and is Pennsylvania’s
51 largest higher education provider, has recently removed criminal history
52 questions from its undergraduate admissions applications; and,
53 WHEREAS, PA State Representative Morgan B. Cephas has introduced
54 legislation¹⁰ that would ban Pennsylvania public colleges and universities

⁸ <https://www.commonapp.org/blog/change-criminal-history-question-2019-2020-application-year>

⁹ <https://whyy.org/articles/ban-the-box-bill-would-nix-criminal-record-question-from-pa-college-applications/>

¹⁰ <https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/Legis/CSM/showMemoPublic.cfm?chamber=H&SPick=20190&cosponId=32508>

55 from asking about an applicant’s criminal record, except for certain
56 offenses.¹¹ This bill would affect all 14 state-owned universities and also
57 state-related universities, including the University of Pittsburgh; *now,*
58 *therefore, be it*

59 RESOLVED, that the Student Government Board calls upon the University of
60 Pittsburgh to remove all questions about an applicant’s criminal background
61 from the initial undergraduate admissions application; *and be it further*

62 RESOLVED, that the Student Government Board calls upon the University of
63 Pittsburgh to work to ensure the safety of the campus community without
64 asking about criminal history on the initial admissions application; *and be it*
65 *further*

66 RESOLVED, that the Student Government Board calls upon the University to
67 provide flexibility, services, and supports to students with criminal records,
68 to ensure their success at the University (for example, in the forms of
69 counseling, tutoring, and financial aid); *and be it further*

70 RESOLVED, that the Student Government Board calls upon the University to
71 assist students when their intended field bars people with criminal histories.
72 The University must support students in overcoming and navigating those
73 restrictions, rather than discouraging them from entering the field of their
74 intended profession; *and be it further*

¹¹ <https://www.post-gazette.com/news/education/2020/10/21/pennsylvania-Campus-crime-criminal-justice-reform-Pennsylvania-Ortitay-Cephas-public-colleges-universities/stories/202010210119>

75 RESOLVED, that the Student Government Board calls upon the University to
76 advocate to licensing boards and professional certification entities that
77 students with criminal backgrounds should not be categorically barred from
78 certain professions or employment fields; *and be it finally*
79 RESOLVED, that this resolution shall be effective immediately upon adoption and
80 shall reflect the changes shown in the attached opinion of the Student
81 Government Board.

Eric Macadangdang, President
University of Pittsburgh Student Government Board