

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear \_\_\_\_\_, (leave blank)

I am writing to urge you to support **The Fair Access to Education Act (S6437/A8574)**, which is inspired by Vivian Nixon who experienced the devastating impact of criminal history screening in college admissions. After serving time in prison, Vivian was determined to transform her life, and a college education became central to her goal. The first college to which she applied and for which she was academically well qualified denied her admission based upon criminal history screening.

Vivian's college application experience is not unique. Every year thousands of students are routinely denied admission to colleges and universities across the United States solely because of a criminal record. When these students are denied access to education society loses out on the contributions that could be made by so many who could be like Vivian. Today she is the Executive Director of College and Community Fellowship, an innovative organization that assists formerly incarcerated women in pursuit of higher education, leadership skills, and career paths that lead to economic security. Vivian is a recognized national expert on education both inside prison and out.

- Criminal history screenings are unfair and unjustified obstacles to gaining a higher education. They run contrary to successful reentry and reintegration. Even though more than 65% of colleges and Universities nationally screen applicants for criminal justice involvement, no evidence exists to prove that these screenings improve campus safety.
- Screening applicants for criminal justice involvement causes disproportionate numbers of African Americans and Hispanics to be excluded from college. These disparities have been documented in the processing of every type of crime, from juvenile delinquency to low-level misdemeanors to the imposition of the death penalty. They threaten to roll back the achievements gained as a result of *Brown vs. Board of Education*.

SUNY has a longstanding policy of criminal history screenings, including in its online SUNY Application Service, where applicants must disclose felony convictions. Certain SUNY campuses actually require applicants to obtain, at their own expense, their criminal history records from the NY State Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS). These records contain sealed, confidential information, including dismissed charges, and youthful offender adjudications. Nevertheless, failure to submit these records, which SUNY has no statutory right to access, leads to denial of admission. Furthermore, in November 2012, SUNY issued a draft policy that encourages all campuses to obtain and submit DCJS records. This is a huge step backwards, since it encourages schools that were not asking for criminal history records, to do so.

I strongly urge you to support **The Fair Access to Education Act**, critical legislation to ban the unfair and unjust obstacles of the use of criminal history screening which affects community members in your district and across the state.

Thank you for your consideration,

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Print Name \_\_\_\_\_

Full Address \_\_\_\_\_

(Please provide full street address and zip code. No P.O. Boxes please.)

Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Please return completed form to: T. Thompson, 177 Livingston St., 6<sup>th</sup> Floor,  
Brooklyn, NY 11201