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## **TESTIMONY ON ASSEMBLY BILL NO. 3837**

**ARI ROSMARIN, PUBLIC POLICY DIRECTOR  
AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION OF NEW JERSEY**

### **ASSEMBLY LABOR COMMITTEE**

*December 16, 2013*

Thank you Chairman Egan and the other members of the Committee. My name is Ari Rosmarin. I am the Public Policy Director for the American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey (ACLU-NJ). The ACLU-NJ is a non-profit, nonpartisan organization founded in 1960 to promote and defend the rights and freedoms in the New Jersey and federal Constitutions. The ACLU has tens of thousands of members statewide and hundreds of thousands of members across the country.

The ACLU proud to testify before this committee today in support of the Opportunity to Compete Act, a bill that could help thousands upon thousands in our state fulfill their dreams of a better life.

The ACLU works across the country and in New Jersey on a broad range of criminal justice reforms seeking to mitigate the harms of over-criminalization and mass incarceration. These include promoting alternatives to incarceration, reducing the prison population, and, critically, working to reduce the often-devastating collateral consequences of conviction. Indeed, one of the greatest harms of over-policing and high rates of incarceration is the economic damage done to communities by such policies.

In an already poor job market, a candidate with a criminal record finds all doors closed. Combined with the ever-present racial disparities in our criminal justice system, the laws this bill seeks to amend bear some responsibility for the high unemployment rate among people of color. By giving people who deserve a second chance a modicum of power in their job search, enactment of the Opportunity to Compete Act could eliminate some of the back door racial and ethnic discrimination people with criminal records face on a daily basis.

Our society holds up a double standard for people with criminal records, simultaneously expecting them to rehabilitate themselves yet placing significant obstacles in front of them every step of the way. Someone with a criminal history lives with the ever-present anxiety that disclosure of what may be their worst mistake on their worst day could eclipse all of their other merits, and they brace themselves for rejection.

For countless people in New Jersey, this legislation could mean a future where individuals are judged by potential employers on their merit, and not only on their mistakes. The Opportunity to Compete Act in its current form makes a reasonable compromise between the concerns of employers and the needs of thousands of New Jerseyans who seek only to have a fair shot at supporting themselves, their families, and their communities.

We strongly urge this committee to give individuals who want nothing more than to be able to leave their pasts behind them and to become productive, contributing members of our communities, the opportunity to do so. Please vote yes on A3837. Thank you