



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Velmanette Montgomery

## Senator Montgomery Applauds SUNY's Decision To "Ban The Box"

SENATOR VELMANETTE MONTGOMERY September 16, 2016

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

State Senator Velmanette Montgomery applauds the State University of New York (SUNY) decision to "Ban the Box" from its admissions applications. On September 14th, the SUNY Board of Trustees voted to no longer require potential students to declare prior felony convictions when applying to SUNY schools. Access to higher education for formerly incarcerated individuals has been linked to decreased recidivism and has a positive impact on reentry into the community.

“With this recent move, the quality and affordable education provided by SUNY will now be accessible to thousands of individuals trying to get a leg up after going through the criminal justice system,” said State Senator Montgomery.

Advocates such as Reverend Vivian Nixon, Executive Director of the College and Community Fellowship and Glenn E. Martin, Founder of JustLeadershipUSA, both of whom have spent time in New York State prisons, have been at the forefront of these issues, leading by example to empower previously incarcerated individuals. Rev. Nixon’s work at the College and Community Fellowship focuses on providing previously incarcerated women with the opportunity to pursue higher education as well as support services and resources that help them transition into the community and develop leadership skills. Mr. Martin recruits previously incarcerated individuals to be the primary advocates, leaders and change makers when it comes to ending mass incarceration.

Advocates like Rev. Nixon and Mr. Martin have been vital partners to policy makers. With their support and advocacy, Senator Montgomery introduced the GED bill (S979/A3838) with Assemblyman Aubry, which was signed into law this year. The GED bill requires the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) to provide an opportunity for incarcerated individuals to obtain their GED while in prison.

Senator Montgomery also introduced the Fair Access to Education Act (S969/A3363) with Assemblywoman Peoples-Stokes, which remains in committee. The Fair Access to Education Act, which is named for Rev. Nixon, would “Ban the Box” in all college admission applications and make it an unlawful discriminatory practice to ask about or consider prior criminal justice involvement during the application and admission decision-making process.

Also in committee is legislation introduced by Senator Montgomery and Assemblyman Aubry (S975/A2870) which would allow incarcerated persons to receive financial aid, including TAP while pursuing higher education in prison.

“This is a very progressive move in our state and I am so proud of Chancellor Zimpher and the SUNY Board of Trustees for taking the initiative to push us forward. We will miss Chancellor Zimpher’s leadership when she steps down next year but she has left us with an extremely important policy change which will result in greater access for a population that faces monumental barriers to higher education,” said State Senator Montgomery.