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## Workforce board pilots expungement program

MARY ALFORD The News-Enterprise

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Timi-Michelle Tolhurst, an employee at Hardin Memorial Health CareFirst Urgent Care Center in Radcliff, was the first participant to complete the expungement process from start to finish in Lincoln Trail Workforce Development Board Workforce Crisis Task Force's Expungement Benefit Program.

Submitted photo

Timi-Michelle Tolhurst had a background check ran last week and it came back clean for the first time in 10 years.

"It was pretty exciting to see that," she said.

Tolhurst, an employee at Hardin Memorial Health's CareFirst Urgent Care Center in Radcliff, is the first participant to complete the expungement process from start to finish in Lincoln Trail Workforce Development Board Workforce Crisis Task Force's Expungement Benefit Program. A virtual news conference was held Tuesday on the topic.

Tolhurst was arrested for a Class D felony in 2010, a mark that had been on her record ever since, making it difficult for her to find employment. Since that offense, she has graduated with an associate degree from Elizabethtown Community and Technical College and graduated with a degree in sociology from Western Kentucky University.

Tolhurst also has been married for seven years and is the mother to an 11-year-old and a newborn.

"We've had a successful life but that felony box can make things hard on you," she said. "... Felons aren't always bad people. You make one mistake. Sometimes that is a misdemeanor ... sometimes it's a felony."

The Expungement Benefit Program was developed by the Removing Obstacles subcommittee of the development board's Workforce Crisis Task Force to help eliminate this hindrance. Through the program, employers assist employees with the expungement process and associated costs to remove qualifying Class D felony convictions from their records, which can be an impediment to success.

"Many people in our region are fully capable and willing to work, but aren't for many reasons," said Julia Springsteen, Removing Obstacles Subcommittee co-chairwoman. "The Expungement Benefit Program is a conduit to assist these people on their career journey and help solve the skilled worker shortage in our region."

Springsteen said by expunging an individual's record, he or she will not have to disclose the criminal record or any related matter to employers.

Hardin Memorial was the first regional employer to participate in the Expungement Benefit Program. Following one year of employment and based on her performance, Tolhurst and HMH Human Resources staff began the process to complete the expungement paperwork and filing.

"For people like me who want to put that chapter of their lives behind them, support their families and give back to society, this program is essential," Tolhurst said. "It has allowed me not just a job, but a career in what I'm trained to do."

Hardin Memorial Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer Myra Covault said hosting the pilot program allowed HMH to experience its success firsthand.

"In working together with the Removing Obstacles subcommittee to develop this program, we not only are increasing the pool of qualified workers, but we also are providing people with a second chance," Covault said. "We would encourage any employer to develop their own Expungement Benefit program."

The Removing Obstacles subcommittee is creating a customizable Expungement Benefit Program template to better assist regional employers in developing a program. It will allow them to replicate the pilot program's success with existing human resource policies and industry-specific needs.

“Anything we can do to make the journey to gainful employment easier benefits both employers and job seekers,” said Dr. Donielle Lovell, Removing Obstacles Subcommittee co-chairwoman and director of regional programming and associate professor of sociology at Western Kentucky University. “This program is a game changer for our region. It will help broaden the pool of applicants for jobs, incentivize retention, and create another pathway for skilled residents to enter the workforce.”

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