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Lawmakers criticize hiring of Obamacare enrollers with criminal records



State lawmakers are criticizing the Covered California insurance exchange for allowing convicted felons to be enrollment counselors. Above, Executive Director Peter Lee discusses recent enrollment. (Rich Pedroncelli / Associated Press)

By Chad Terhune
January 30, 2014 | 10:34 a.m.

California's health insurance exchange allowed 31 people with criminal records to be enrollment counselors for Obamacare coverage, drawing fire from Republican lawmakers.

Two state legislators are calling for a hearing on the exchange's hiring practices and its efforts to prevent identity theft and fraud.

This move comes as other critics of the Affordable Care Act express concern about the security of people's personal information when they apply for policies through online exchanges or with enrollment workers.

In a letter Wednesday, Assembly Minority leader Connie Conway (R-Tulare) and Assemblyman Brian Nestande (R-Palm Desert) asked the Covered California exchange to explain at a joint legislative hearing why people convicted of forgery, burglary and welfare fraud were permitted to be enrollment counselors.

"We understand that individuals who have paid their debt to society deserve a second chance, but

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felons convicted of financial crimes should be disqualified from being hired by the state," the lawmakers said in their letter.

"Allowing these individuals to have access to private information, such as Social Security numbers, would be like giving an auto thief a set of car keys," they added.

Covered California defends its background check system. It said it reviewed the age and nature of the offense, the applicant's age when it was committed and the relation of the crime to enrollment duties.

[Full coverage: Obamacare rolls out](#)

The approved applicants "demonstrated that they have rehabilitated themselves," said exchange spokesman Larry Hicks. "A zero-tolerance approach for all individuals who have suffered criminal convictions would constitute discrimination" under federal civil-rights law.

The state exchange provided records that show it approved 31 people with criminal convictions as enrollment counselors from June to late November. Four people with convictions were disqualified.

The National Review reported on the documents Wednesday.

Overall, California has certified 3,729 enrollment counselors statewide so those with criminal records represent less than 1% by this count.

The convictions involved felonies and misdemeanors and many date back to the 1980s and 1990s. The crimes included the sale and possession of drugs, petty theft, perjury, driving under the influence, shoplifting and battery.

One certified counselor had two convictions for forgery in 1988 and a 1998 conviction for domestic violence, state records show. Another counselor had a 1982 conviction for forgery, burglary in 1992 and forgery again in 1994.

These enrollment counselors aren't government employees. Rather, they typically work at nonprofit groups, clinics and other community organizations that help sign people up through the state marketplace.

During the application process, these workers often deal with sensitive information such as Social Security numbers, income tax returns and a person's medical needs.

Covered California said it is still reviewing the lawmakers' request and it declined to comment further.

In a related move this week, Assemblyman Jeff Gorell (R-Camarillo) introduced legislation that would bar Covered California from sharing applicants' personal information unless consumers give consent.

In December, The Times reported the exchange gave its certified insurance agents access to names and contact information for tens of thousands of people who started an online application but never finished.

Some consumers said the practice violated their privacy because they didn't ask to be contacted. Covered California's executive director, Peter Lee, said last week the program is on hold pending further review.

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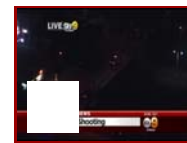
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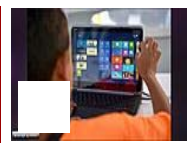
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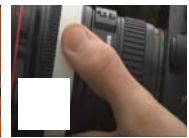
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Brud01 at 2:46 PM February 05, 2014

Well...at least they're not politicians, and particularly not Republican politicians. I'd feel much safer with a person with a previous criminal record than a Republican politician of any stripe.

Sojourner of Truth at 6:20 AM February 05, 2014

Background checks are based on junk science. Studies have shown that within 3 years of release from custody, they lose all statistical relevancy and the odds of a former offender committing a new crime are statistically even with the population as a whole. Because of mass incarceration and the war on drugs, minorities have been disproportionately impacted by the use of background checks as a screening tool. It's time to move into the 21st century and start using science instead of superstition for the selection of employees.

RisingPhoenix at 3:31 PM February 04, 2014


Really? What about MEMBERS OF CONGRESS who have CRIMINAL RECORDS. Does the name DARRELL ISSA ring a bell???? I can post a link that has the names of HUNDREDS of CRIMINAL POLITICIANS who are serving or have served.


http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_American_federal_politicians_convicted_of_crimes

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