

We All Benefit from a Clean Slate for Minor Criminal Records

Over the past two decades, even the most minor criminal convictions have become lifetime barriers to the necessities of life – jobs, housing, education, and much more. The most effective public policy strategy to address these many barriers is to eliminate the record. A new proposal known as “Clean Slate” (SB 1197/HB 1984) is a powerful anti-recidivism tool that will allow Pennsylvanians with minor criminal records to get past these barriers, to the benefit of the broader community.

What is Clean Slate?

- **Clean Slate allows most minor non-violent cases to be automatically sealed** (not available to the public, but only law enforcement) after time has passed without conviction of a felony or a misdemeanor. For misdemeanors, that period is 10 years. For summary offenses, it is 5 years. Non-convictions would be sealed when the outcome of the case is final.
- **Clean Slate is an agreement with the person with the criminal record: If you remain crime-free for the required period of time, your case will be sealed.** No petition for sealing or court order is needed.

Why does Clean Slate make sense?

- **People who have committed crime often redeem themselves.** Research shows that people with nonviolent convictions who do not commit another crime within 4-7 years are no more likely to commit a crime in the future than the general population is.
- **But redeemed people face lifetime barriers.** For instance, nearly 9 in 10 employers, 4 in 5 of landlords, and 3 in 5 colleges use criminal record background checks, putting employment, housing, and higher education out of reach for many. To help alleviate these barriers, 23 states and DC have expanded their expungement laws since 2009.
- **Clean Slate allows sealing to be done automatically.** Individuals do not need to file expungement petitions one by one, burdening the courts.

Who benefits from Clean Slate? We all do!

- **People with criminal records** know that if they stay out of trouble, their records will be sealed. They will be able to move on with their lives and access the basics needed for economic security and mobility.
- **Families and children of people with criminal records** will benefit as income increases, housing improves, and other obstacles to families’ well-being are eliminated.
- **The criminal justice system** will not be burdened with the transactional costs of tens of thousands of sealing petitions.
- **States and localities** will save money as a result of reduced incarceration.
- **Pennsylvania’s economy** will benefit from not shutting hundreds of thousands of qualified jobseekers out of the labor force. Criminal records policies cost \$65 billion a year in lost GDP) nationally
- Most importantly, **communities will be safer** as a result of the strong anti-recidivism effect of people having an incentive to remain crime-free.

