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Senate Committee on the Judiciary

Thursday, April 11, 2024

Testimony in Support of H 655

To Chairman Dick Sears and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jesse Kelley, and I am the Senior Policy Strategist at The Clean Slate Initiative - a national non-profit whose mission is to work alongside states to streamline the record-clearing process. Therefore, I am writing on behalf of The Clean Slate Initiative to express our support for House Bill 655, which aims to expand eligibility via the petition-based process.

As of 2019, about 100,000 people in Vermont, or about 1 in 5 adults, have some form of a record.¹ The Clean Slate Initiative applauds the proposed expansion of eligibility, specifically focusing on increasing the availability of second chances for individuals with multiple convictions.

Vermont is taking strides to expand eligibility for record clearance, recognizing the transformative impact it can have on individuals, communities, and the economy as a whole. Clearing criminal records opens doors to stable housing, career advancement, and higher education opportunities.

We know from research and experience that when barriers to these fundamental aspects of life are removed, individuals can thrive by supporting their

¹ These estimates were produced from available public data sources. Learn more about our research methodology at <https://www.cleanslateinitiative.org/research-data>

families and remaining crime-free². Vermont's commitment to this expansion is a commendable step towards fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

However, we were disheartened to learn about the removal of the automatic sealing study committee from the bill as introduced. Automatic record clearance is a critical component of the Clean Slate Initiative's mission, aligning with the belief that everyone deserves a fair chance to move forward from past mistakes.

An automatic process reduces bureaucratic hurdles and ensures that eligible individuals benefit from clearance without navigating complex systems. **We strongly urge the committee to reconsider this omission and amend the bill to include provisions for the automatic record clearance study committee.** Such a committee would provide invaluable insights into the effectiveness of automatic record clearance, guiding future policy decisions that can positively impact countless lives. The Clean Slate Initiative can be a resource as policymakers and agencies aim to learn more about automatically sealing records.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am available to answer any questions or provide additional information as needed.

Sincerely,

Jesse Kelley

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² "Having a job, however, has been shown to reduce recidivism, and individuals are less likely to commit crimes when they have stable, full-time employment." Grant Duwe and Makada Henry-Nickie. "A better path forward for criminal justice: Training and employment for correctional populations. April 2021. bit.ly/4as3qDO