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LEGISLATIVE ACTION ALERT

Pennsylvania on its way to becoming first state to give criminal offenders a 'clean slate'

By [Jan Murphy Pennlive](#) © jmurphy@pennlive.com

Legislation that would give low-level, non-violent criminal offenders [a second chance at rebuilding their lives with a clean record](#) is now on its way to Gov. Tom Wolf for enactment. The Senate voted 49-0, with no debate, to approve the [House-passed bill](#) that would automatically seal the criminal records of individuals who committed certain misdemeanors in Pennsylvania after they served their sentence and go 10 years without another arrest. However, law enforcement could still have access to that information to perform their duties. Wolf has signaled his intention to sign this bill, which would make Pennsylvania the first state in the nation to enact a "Clean Slate" bill that would remove lifelong barriers that can block successful re-entry and participation in society for certain criminal offenders. Nearly 1 in 3 Pennsylvania adults has some type of criminal records, which can hold them back from going to college, getting a job or a place to live.

The legislation, sponsored by Reps. Sheryl Delozier, R-Cumberland County, and Jordan Harris, D-Philadelphia, were among those who participated in a news conference earlier this week organized by the U.S. Justice Action Network. That organization commissioned a poll in 2017 that found 81 percent of Pennsylvanians generally support the bipartisan-backed "Clean Slate" proposal. Delozier said this bill allows people who "made a mistake when they are young" and have gone on to live a life free of arrest for 10 years to get a second chance. She called it a good bill for individuals with records trying to find jobs as well as employers who are provided some protections for damages suffered as a result of criminal or unlawful conduct related to an employee's sealed criminal history information. It also will help individuals who now live on the right side of the law to be able to get apartments, which they sometimes now are precluded from doing, she said.

Harris has called it the next step to a law put on the books in 2016 that allowed a person to petition the court to have their record sealed for certain non-violent misdemeanors. This legislation would eliminate that step to having a criminal record sealed. Sharon Dietrich, Litigation Director of Community Legal Services, commended all the various groups who came together to support this bill, including business, labor and legal communities. "The people who will be helped by Clean Slate were not given a life sentence for their relatively minor cases. But they are serving one just the same. Clean Slate will do so much good for so many people, at almost no cost," Dietrich said.

People whose records would be eligible for sealing can file petitions to seal their records 180 days after the bill is signed into law. Automated sealing will begin within two years, which allows time for the Pennsylvania State Police and the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts to make the needed computer changes