Aditi Sherikar
Public Policy Director
The Clean Slate Initiative

Senate Judiciary Committee

March 9, 2026

Testimony in Support of SB 2711 - The Rhode Island Clean Slate Act

To Chair LaMountain and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

My name is Aditi Sherikar, and I am the Public Policy Director at The Clean Slate Initiative - a national non-profit that is working across the country to pass and implement laws that automate the process for sealing eligible arrest and conviction records for people who meet the requirements. The Clean Slate Initiative strongly supports Senate Bill 2711, which aims to address and rectify the impact of past records on individuals and communities.

As of 2019, around 300,000 adults in Rhode Island, or 33% of the adult population, have some form of a record.[1] Even after completing their sentences and remaining crime-free, these constituents are often denied a fair chance at jobs, safe housing, and educational opportunities. Clean Slate legislation has proven to be an effective tool in addressing these challenges by allowing eligible individuals to have their records expunged through an *automated* process, giving them a fresh start while cutting red tape. **On day 1 of implementation, 77,000 adults, or 27% of those with records in the state, would become eligible to have their records fully expunged with Clean Slate legislation .**[2]

Thirteen states, including Connecticut and New York, and the District of Columbia, have already passed Clean Slate laws, and the positive impact has been substantial. One of the key advancements has been automation. By leveraging technology with human oversight to determine eligibility and grant record relief, these states have successfully streamlined the sealing process. Now, Rhode Island has the opportunity to join this growing

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[1] The Clean Slate Initiative. (2024). "Population Estimates to Maximize Policy Impact: The Clean Slate Initiative Methodology for Estimating State Populations with a Record." Available at: cleanslateinitiative.org/data-dashboard.
[2] The Clean Slate Initiative. (2024). "Population Estimates to Maximize Policy Impact: The Clean Slate Initiative Methodology for Estimating State Populations with a Record." Available at: cleanslateinitiative.org/data-dashboard.

national effort to ensure a past mistake does not turn into a life sentence to poverty for those who have paid for their mistakes and turned their lives around.

A recent survey of people with records in Pennsylvania, Utah, and Michigan, which have started implementing automatic record sealing, indicates that those who have received relief are already experiencing improvements in their lives, particularly in employment.

- Nearly half (42%) reported improvement in work, employment, personal finances, or public assistance,
- 35% reported improvement in personal and family relationships, and
- 34% reported improvement in health, mental health, or self-esteem.[3]

Rhode Island can join these states in pursuing fairness and justice by creating a state-initiated process that expunges certain records once individuals are eligible; automating the expungement process would also increase efficiency and make second chances more accessible to Rhode Islanders. Passing this legislation would mean those eligible for automated record expungement in the state can reap the proven benefits, particularly in terms of employment, which will add to the state's tax base.

The Clean Slate Initiative stands ready to collaborate and partner with Rhode Island's agencies in implementing this important bill. Alongside our state and national partners, The Clean Slate Initiative has been assisting states nationwide with the effective implementation of Clean Slate laws, and we are eager to assist your state as well. While every state has its own systems and processes for record sealing, commonalities exist across states, and we can draw upon our nationwide experience to help navigate successful implementation.

In summary, The Clean Slate Initiative urges the Senate Judiciary Committee to support SB 2711, recognizing the positive impact on the lives of individuals seeking redemption and reintegration into society.

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[3] The Clean Slate Initiative (2024). "The Impacts of Clean Slate Laws in Pennsylvania, Utah, and Michigan." Available at: https://www.cleanslateinitiative.org/2024-yougov-survey-report

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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Attachments:

- Research Brief: Automatic Record Clearance Removes Barriers and Delivers Improvements for People with Records

AUTOMATIC RECORD CLEARANCE REMOVES BARRIERS AND DELIVERS IMPROVEMENTS FOR PEOPLE WITH RECORDS

A Clean Slate Research Brief by [Dr. Laura Chavez](#)

People with records face substantial barriers that limit their participation in society, particularly in employment, housing, and education. Clean Slate laws address these challenges by automatically sealing eligible records for individuals who have completed their sentences and remained crime-free. Thus, the burden of clearance shifts from individuals to the state, eliminating the burden of navigating a complex, costly, and often inaccessible petition-based system.

This research brief draws on a recent [survey of 800 people with arrest and conviction records in Pennsylvania, Utah, and Michigan,](#) The survey was developed by CSI in collaboration with Dr. Nyron Crawford, Associate Professor of Political Science at Temple University, and administered by YouGov. Here we highlight the economic, social, and psychological impacts of Clean Slate laws as revealed by the survey data.

Just a few years after passage, Clean Slate legislation is already benefiting people in Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Utah

Clean Slate laws have been passed in 12 states to date, including Pennsylvania in 2018, Utah in 2019, and Michigan in 2020. By 2024, 15 million people became eligible for full or partial record clearance across the 12 Clean Slate states,[1] and over 2 million are eligible for full or partial relief in Pennsylvania, Utah, and Michigan, which started clearing records automatically in 2019,

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[1] See The Clean Slate Initiative. (2024). "Population Estimates to Maximize Policy Impact: The Clean Slate Initiative Methodology for Estimating State Populations with a Record." Available at: cleanslateinitiative.org/data

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There are a lot of reasons why people don't seek record relief.

"Because it cost[s] a lot of money in my state last I checked."

"Financially, I could not afford a lawyer to get it done."

"Too complicated, costly, unsure of the routes to take."

"At first I wasn't aware that I could. After that it was because I didn't know anything about the process, how to get started, or if I would even be eligible to do so."

This data is from a survey of people with records in MI, PA, and UT. More info: cleanslateinitiative.space/2024-yougov

2020, and 2023, respectively. Many of these records are over 10 years old,[2] so very real questions existed among lawmakers, advocates, and directly impacted people as to whether the clearance of decades-old records would deliver tangible benefits.

The survey data clearly indicate that those eligible for automatic record clearance are already experiencing real improvements in their lives. Unlike petition-based systems, where individuals must navigate complex legal procedures, pay fees, and often require legal assistance to clear their records, Clean Slate laws remove these barriers by automating the process. This is particularly significant because studies show that only a small fraction of those eligible ever file petitions for records clearance.[3] The reasons are clear: the petition-based process is often prohibitively difficult, expensive, and inaccessible for many, especially those already burdened by the economic and social consequences of having a record.

By shifting the burden to the state, Clean Slate laws ensure that relief reaches all eligible individuals, including those who may not even know they qualify. This automatic process eliminates the need for legal intervention, democratizing access to record clearance and delivering benefits to people who would otherwise remain trapped by their past. The data show

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[2] In Pennsylvania, the passage of "Clean Slate 3.0" expanded eligibility for automatic sealing in 2024 to include some non-violent felony convictions, which can become eligible for sealing after 10 years, and many misdemeanor convictions may be sealed after 7 years. Summary convictions can be sealed after 5 years (see: www.mycleanslatepa.com). In Michigan, some felony convictions are eligible for automatic set aside after 10 years, and many misdemeanor convictions are eligible after 7 years (see: https://www.michigan.gov/msp/services/chr/conviction-set-aside-public-information/michigan-clean-slate). And, in Utah, misdemeanor convictions are eligible for automatic expungement after 5 to 7 years (see: www.cleanslateutah.org).

[3] See: Chien, Colleen. "America's paper prisons: The second chance gap." *Michigan Law Review* (2020): 519-611. See also: Prescott, J.J. and S. Starr. (2020). Expungement of Criminal Convictions: An Empirical Study. *Harvard Law Review*. 133(8): 2460-555.

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that people with automatically cleared records report improvements in employment opportunities, family relationships, and mental health, showing that Clean Slate's systemic approach can be more effective at providing relief and helping people rebuild their lives than the traditional petition-based system.

In this survey of people with records, nearly half (46%) of those who had a criminal record sealed, expunged, or set aside had their record cleared *automatically*.

Nearly 1 in 3 (29 percent) strongly or somewhat agreed they **know someone who has already benefited or will likely benefit in the future from their state's Clean Slate law.**

This data is from a survey of people with records in MI, PA, and UT. More info: cleanslateinitiative.space/2024-yougov

Respondents felt that they had benefited personally from record clearance and that they would continue to benefit in the future.

- Over one-third (38%) of those whose records were cleared automatically agreed that they had already benefited or would likely benefit from Clean Slate laws.

- 36% of Black people agreed they know someone who has already benefited or will likely benefit in the future.
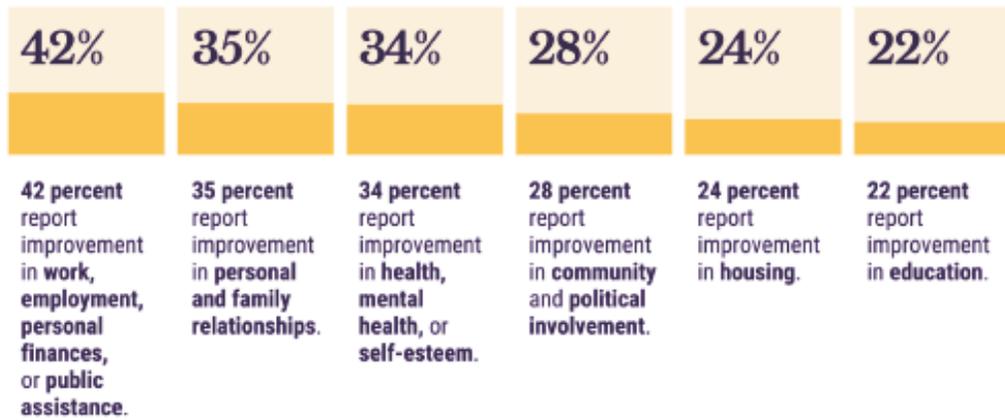
People who know their records have been cleared automatically report improvements, especially in employment, family relationships, and mental health

Research demonstrates that when people's records are cleared through a petition-based process, their earnings increase by over 22% in the first year.[4] Yet even with this research, the question remained as to whether this same benefit is realized by people who don't have to take action to clear their

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[4] See: Prescott, J.J. and S. Starr. (2020). Expungement of Criminal Convictions: An Empirical Study. *Harvard Law Review.* 133(8): 2460-555.

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Clean Slate's Impact

People who **received automatic record relief report improvements**, particularly economic.

42%	35%	34%	28%	24%	22%
42 percent report improvement in **work, employment, personal finances,** or **public assistance**.	35 percent report improvement in **personal and family relationships**.	34 percent report improvement in **health, mental health,** or **self-esteem**.	28 percent report improvement in **community** and **political involvement**.	24 percent report improvement in **housing**.	22 percent report improvement in **education**.

This data is from a survey of people with records in MI, PA, and UT.
More info: cleanslateinitiative.space/2024-yougov

records. In addition, it has been unclear whether someone would even know if their record had been cleared when the process happens automatically by the government. Directly impacted respondents in three states that have recently passed and implemented Clean Slate laws, thus clearing millions of people's records automatically, report overwhelming improvements in a wide range of life factors.
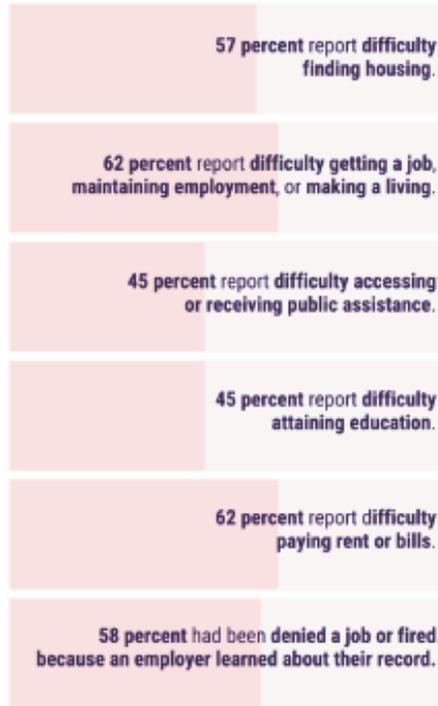
People with records face economic hardships due to their arrest or conviction.

53%	39%	31%	25%
Over half of the sample (53 percent) report that it was **extremely or somewhat difficult in at least one area of their life** following their arrest or conviction.	Over 1 in 3 (39 percent) report that it was **extremely or somewhat difficult** to **get a job, maintain employment, make a living,** and **pay rent or bills**.	31 percent report **difficulties finding housing**.	1 in 4 (25 percent) report **difficulties attaining education and accessing or receiving public assistance**.

This data is from a survey of people with records in MI, PA, and UT.
More info: cleanslateinitiative.space/2024-yougov

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People with felony convictions face the most barriers.

Over 3 out of 4 (77 percent) of respondents with felony convictions report that it was **extremely or somewhat difficult** in at least one of these areas following their record.

57 percent report **difficulty finding housing.**

62 percent report **difficulty getting a job, maintaining employment,** or **making a living.**

45 percent report **difficulty accessing or receiving public assistance.**

45 percent report **difficulty attaining education.**

62 percent report **difficulty paying rent or bills.**

58 percent had been **denied a job or fired** because an employer learned about their record.

This data is from a survey of people with records in MI, PA, and UT. More info: cleanslateinitiative.space/2024-xnsgov

Even small improvements really matter when people with records face major barriers

There are over 42,000 laws and regulations that make having a record an ongoing burden. Over half of the people surveyed (53%) report that it was extremely or somewhat difficult in at least one area of their life following their arrest or conviction.

Barriers are even more significant for people with felony convictions. Among respondents with felony convictions, well over half (58%) had been denied a job or fired because their employer learned they had been arrested or convicted, and another 9% responded "maybe."

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About The Clean Slate Initiative

The Clean Slate Initiative (CSI) passes and implements laws that **automatically clear eligible records** for people who have completed their sentence and remained crime-free and **expands** who is eligible for clearance.

CSI's vision is that people will no longer be defined by their records and will have the opportunity to contribute to their community, have a fair opportunity to work, get an education, and achieve their full potential.

Acknowledgments

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