



Earlier this month, Governor Gretchen Whitmer signed bipartisan House Bills 4980-4985 and 5120. This package, known as the “Clean Slate Bill”, reforms Michigan’s expungement process to help countless Michigan citizens get their criminal records cleared. It is estimated that this passage will directly help 1 in 3 Michiganders. Citizens who will be helped by this bill have seven-year-old misdemeanors, 10-year-old non-assaultive felonies, traffic offenses or marijuana offenses (many of which are retroactively non-criminal since its legalization).

Removing a criminal record also removes lifelong stigma and barriers to opportunities that so many in the state face. This news is especially welcome now, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, as it helps to open employment possibilities and remove barriers to much need aid in this crisis. It has been estimated that those who are able to get their records expunged have seen a 20% wage increase within the following year of having a clean slate. Prior to the passage of these bills, only about 6.5 percent of people with eligibility of expungement were able to navigate the red tape of the process as well as come up with the funds to pay for the many related fees to do so.

Women and those with marginalized identities have the most to gain from this bill passage. Having a criminal record is immeasurably detrimental for women who are seeking employment, access to safe housing and credit, and even opportunities for post-secondary education. The idea of a “second chance” is often touted for those who have had a conviction, but the reality of being given that chance does not exist when the policies of employers and landlords prohibit those with records from gaining access to basic needs and stability.

To learn more about the details of this bill package, check out Safe and Just Michigan’s website at <https://www.safeandjustmi.org/our-work/clean-slate-for-michigan/> .