

TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Katie Connolly, Senior Vice President
RE: ACLU-CT Research on Public Support for Clean Slate Laws
DATE: February 19, 2020

- A recent poll conducted on behalf of the ACLU-CT among likely 2020 voters in Connecticut demonstrates clear and widespread support for clean slate laws.
- Fully 60% of Connecticut voters would **support laws that allow people who have been convicted of crimes to have their criminal records automatically erased** by authorities after five years if they have not engaged in any new criminal activity. This support crosses party lines, and even 59% of those who self-identified as having been a victim of crime would support such a law.
- Further, when informed that Connecticut does not currently have a clean slate law on the books, 64% of voters said it was important that the state legislature pass a clean slate law that is backed up by protections against discrimination for former offenders when they seek housing, employment and other basic services.
 - When tested as a standalone policy, 57% of Connecticut voters would support a law that prevents discrimination against those with criminal records and levies penalties on businesses, landlords and employers who have engaged in discrimination.

<i>% Support (Strongly + Somewhat Support)</i>	All Voters	Dem	Ind	Rep
In general, do you support or oppose laws that allow people who have been convicted of crimes to have their criminal records automatically erased by authorities after five years? A person would only be granted this clean slate if they have not engaged in any new criminal activity.	60%	70%	53%	56%

<i>% Important (Very + Somewhat Important)</i>	All Voters	Dem	Ind	Rep
Currently, the state of Connecticut has no automatic erasure “clean slate” law. Instead, it allows for people to apply for a pardon, but the process is very difficult, regardless of how big or small the crime committed was.				
In your view, how important is it for the state legislature to pass a law that would automatically erase criminal records and prevent discrimination against former offenders when they seek out things like housing, insurance, education and employment?	64%	78%	60%	50%

- Support for a clean slate law in Connecticut emerges out of voters’ strong belief that a core mission of our prison system is rehabilitation and redemption for formerly incarcerated people – a value held by Democrats, Republicans and Independents alike.
 - Voters agree the main purpose of prison should be “to rehabilitate people so they can successfully reenter society and not commit crimes again in the future” – 84% agree (43% **strongly** agree), including nearly two in three Republicans (64%).



- An overwhelming majority of Connecticut voters are committed to the philosophy that everyone deserves a second chance, so that formerly incarcerated citizens don't have their convictions held against them indefinitely.
 - 85% agree, including 40% who **strongly** agree, *"People who have been convicted of a crime and have served their sentence should have a fair shot at getting their lives back on track without having their prison sentence held against them. Everyone deserves a second chance, even those who have been convicted of a crime."*
 - This attitude crosses party lines, with 91% of Democrats in overall agreement, 88% of Independents and 72% of Republicans.
- Similarly, Connecticut voters believe we have a collective responsibility to ensure that those released from prison have the tools they need for success: 74% agree *"Once someone has been imprisoned and earned their chance to reenter society, we should be setting them up for success, no matter what crime they were arrested for or convicted of."*
 - In a forced choice, a clear majority side with the belief that if given the right kind of help, former offenders will become real contributors to our community.

<i>Which statement do you agree with more?</i>	All Voters	Dem	Ind	Rep
People who have been convicted of a crime can turn their lives around and become productive members of our community if they can get the right kind of help.	77%	83%	80%	64%
People who have been convicted of a crime are unlikely to change and will almost always be a danger to society.	22%	16%	18%	36%

- Connecticut voters appear concerned that we are sending too many people to prison, and this has ramifications for the ability of people to get back on their feet.
 - 63% say it is important that we reduce the number of people in prison.
 - 74% agree that *"We send too many people to prison for minor offenses and when they finally get released, they struggle to get steady jobs and housing because having served time suggests they've done something much worse than they have."*
- There is little sympathy across the board for arguments that those with criminal records pose too great a risk to employers or landlords (*see forced choice question below*).

<i>Which statement do you agree with more?</i>	All Voters	Dem	Ind	Rep
Everyone deserves a second chance and a person's record of arrest or conviction alone does not tell you whether they will be a good employee, neighbor, or insurance policy holder.	82%	92%	82%	69%
It's just too risky for landlords, insurance companies and business owners to rent, provide services to or hire someone with a criminal record and they should be allowed to turn those people down without question.	15%	7%	15%	29%

- And the fact that major companies such as Coca Cola and CVS, along with the US military, have given former offenders a fair chance at employment proved to be a convincing reason to support a law that would prevent discrimination.



- 79% of all voters, 85% of Democrats, 82% of Independents and 66% of Republicans said the following was a somewhat or very convincing reason to “support a law that would prevent discrimination against people who have been previously convicted of a crime when they seek out things like housing, insurance, education and employment”:
“Some of America’s biggest companies, including Coca Cola, CVS and Ben and Jerry’s have signed pledges to give those with criminal records a fair chance at employment because they recognize the important contributions these workers can make. The US military has found that those with felony records who have enlisted have a greater likelihood of being promoted to sergeant than others.”

Methodology

Benenson Strategy Group conducted 510 telephone and online interviews from January 30 to February 5, 2020 on behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut. All respondents were registered voters in Connecticut who are likely to vote in the 2020 general election. The margin of error for the data set is $\pm 4.3\%$ at the 95% confidence level and it is higher among subgroups.

