

YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES ACT

REMOVING BARRIERS FOR REHABILITATED YOUTH

When barred from important opportunities, youth can become trapped in a cycle of poverty and homelessness.

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Actual email received by a legal service provider:

*"Hi My Name is Dana**

I am a former foster child who aged out of care in 2010.

I am currently homeless, without employment and without education.

I am running into problems getting a job due to a juvenile court record.

I had a felony at the age of 14 and have fines in the amount of \$750.

If I can't seal my record, I can't get a job. If I can't get a job, I can't get a home. If I can't get a job, I can't pay for a GED.

I need your help."

** Name changed to protect anonymity*

The Washington State juvenile justice system is founded upon the core principle of rehabilitation. Society benefits when rehabilitated youth reintegrate into society and become law-abiding and contributing members of their communities. A major barrier to reintegration is the widespread dissemination and easy public access to juvenile court records in our state.

Washington's Current Policies Prevent Youth From Reintegrating into Society

- Having a juvenile offense record can prevent youth from obtaining education, employment, and housing - leading to a **cycle of poverty, homelessness, and crime**.
- In Washington, court records of any alleged juvenile offense are **open to the public and disseminated online** - even if the charges were dismissed or the youth was not convicted.
- Washington is one of only eight states that openly broadcast juvenile records. As a result, **Washington's youth are at a disadvantage compared to youth from other states**.
- A youth can petition the court to have his or her record sealed, but the process is costly, lengthy, and difficult to navigate without an attorney. Furthermore, **once a record has been put online, it can never truly be sealed**.
- Washington's current juvenile records policies have a **disproportionate impact on minority youth**.

The Youth Opportunities Act Will Diminish this Barrier to Success by:

- **Prohibiting courts and the state from disseminating, selling, or making public juvenile offense records.**
- **Prohibiting private individuals and entities from accessing juvenile offense records, while allowing access by courts and prosecutors.**

The Youth Opportunities Act Will Give Washington's Youth a Chance at Success

- It effectuates the legislature's intent by enabling former juvenile offenders to successfully rehabilitate and reintegrate into their communities.
- It allows youth to pursue educational, employment, and other opportunities without being shackled by childhood mistakes.
- It benefits society by promoting employment amongst Washington's youth, enabling them to contribute to the economy.

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For more information, please contact: uwlegislativeclinic@gmail.com