



March 27, 2023

To: Chairman Evans and Members, House Judiciary Committee

Re: HB 352

Honorable Chair and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

We are testifying on behalf of Women's Voices Raised for Social Justice in support of HB 352, often referred to as Clean Slate legislation. Women's Voices Raised for Social Justice is a nonpartisan organization of more than 400 St. Louis area members who believe that everyone deserves equal economic, political, and social opportunities irrespective of race, gender, or religion. Our mission is education and advocacy which we achieve through free public programs featuring knowledgeable speakers on a wide variety of social justice issues.

Our examination of this initiative began two years ago when the difficulties faced by formerly incarcerated people were brought to our attention by a program focused on reentry services in the St. Louis area. We listened to the life-stories of people who have struggled and even succeeded, but who still carry the heavy baggage of criminal records. Simply put, people are having to pay for the same crime over and over, rather than being able to move on and contribute to society and enhance their own lives.

It was eye opening for most of us to learn of the multiple obstacles that face people returning to our communities because of a criminal record, no matter how minor. Once we knew, we could not look away. We asked ourselves where is the balance between punishment and ruining lives? And if Missouri's statutes have provisions for expunging certain criminal records, why weren't more people seeking and receiving relief? We subsequently learned that 99% of those eligible for expungement are unable to navigate the current petition process due to expense, time, and complexity.

We researched national Clean Slate Initiatives and later joined Empower Missouri and the Missouri Clean Slate Campaign as a partnering organization. Since 2018, ten states have enacted similar Clean Slate legislation, including Michigan, Utah and Oklahoma. Pennsylvania, the first state to pass and implement Clean Slate in 2019, has sealed the records of 1.2 million people (more than 40 million cases); the state has found it so beneficial that it has recently expanded eligibility. A study by The Economy League of Greater Philadelphia predicted that putting to work just 100 previously incarcerated individuals would not only increase their lifetime earnings by \$55 million, income tax contributions by \$1.9 million, and sales tax contributions by \$800,000, but would also save criminal justice agencies \$2 million. Using the same metrics for 1,500 individuals, the study estimated savings could be enough to close a prison facility. Similar efforts in other states have demonstrated the benefits of such legislation, including safer communities, stronger families, and a healthier economy.

Women's Voices Raised for Social Justice is grateful to Representative Christofanelli and co-sponsor Representative Davis for introducing HB 352. We believe HB 352 will provide both help and hope to more than a half-million Missourians who currently meet eligibility criteria for record expungement. We also believe that Clean Slate legislation is smart on crime, makes good business sense, and will boost the State's economy for the following reasons:

- Many of the half-million eligible individuals will be able to earn a decent living, obtain stable housing, and provide for their families.
- Employers will be able to expand their workforce with qualified people eager and able to work.
- Missouri will save taxpayer dollars by bringing more people into the workforce and interrupting the cycle of recidivism and reincarceration. The stigma of a criminal record is a major driver of poverty, which in turn is the strongest predictor for recidivism and the cycle of reincarceration.
- Communities will be safer due to lower recidivism rates as more people are able to move on with their lives and provide for their families.
- Missouri's courts and prosecutors' offices will no longer be burdened with the costs of record-clearing petitions, saving taxpayer dollars.

Justice includes hope and empathy. Those eligible under the current expungement statute have served their time and have earned a second chance and a "clean slate." We request your support on HB 352.

Respectfully,

Mary Schuman and Anne Litwin, Co-Chairs, Criminal Legal System Reform Task Force

Women's Voices Raised for Social Justice

7401 Delmar Boulevard

Saint Louis, MO 63130

314-730-0471

<https://womensvoicesraised.org>