

The Promise

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I am writing on behalf of The Promise, a public-private partnership housed within the United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey aimed at moving Philadelphians out of poverty.

Through our extensive anti-poverty work, we have learned that criminal record barriers are one of the biggest and most insidious causes of poverty in the communities that we serve. As a result, the first Jobs and Opportunities initiative within The Promise was created to begin to address criminal record barriers through record clearing and sealing.

The Promise is funding organizations and community groups to greatly increase capacity for expungement and sealing petitions for Philadelphians through community-based clinics. However, we recognize that no matter how many petitions are filed, we will not be able to fully meet the need for record clearing in our communities. Clean Slate already has sealed over 40 million cases, a number that cannot be even closely approached by petition filing.

Given our focus on record clearing, we strongly support House Bill 1826. Any expansion of automated sealing is a good expansion. But moving into sealing of felonies is extremely important, as Pennsylvania is one of only 13 states to not to permit sealing of at least some felonies. Moreover, drug felonies are among the most common offenses on clients' records. Employers and landlords are generally unwilling to ever allow people with these convictions to move beyond them, even though social science tells us that after 4 years, people with felony drug convictions are no more likely to become system-involved than people without records.

Furthermore, allowing people to clear felonies will also help the businesses of the region at a time that they are suffering from painful job vacancies. In short, the bill will prove beneficial to the entire region that we serve, at virtually no cost.

We urge the General Assembly to enact House Bill 1826 as soon as possible.

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United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey
in partnership with the City of Philadelphia.

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of the letters 'M' and 'B' in a stylized, cursive font.

Michael Banks

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