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Contact: Kate McCracken
Phone: 517.225.3186
Email: kate@safeandjustmi.org

Safe & Just
Michigan

Lt. Gov., Attorney General, Chief Justice among officials celebrating start of expungement expansion in Michigan

Event showcased new free, low-cost legal resources for expungements

LANSING — Michigan Lt. Gov. **Garlin Gilchrist II**, Attorney General **Dana Nessel**, Supreme Court Chief Justice **Bridget McCormack** and Michigan House Judiciary Committee Chairman state Rep. **Graham Filler** (R-DeWitt) joined criminal justice reform advocates including the national Clean Slate Initiative Managing Director **Sheena Meade** who acted as emcee, City of Detroit Project Clean Slate Lead Attorney **Stephani Labelle**, Michigan Advocacy Program Manager of Legal Services Delivery **Shannon Lucas** and Safe & Just Michigan Executive Director **John S. Cooper** at an online event Monday to mark the start of expanded access to expungements in Michigan. Expungements, also known as set-asides, shield old criminal records from view after a person has lived several years crime-free, and they have been shown in studies to pave the way to higher employment rates, greater earning potential and lower recidivism rates. The event was sponsored by Safe & Just Michigan, a Lansing-based nonprofit that works to advance policies that end Michigan's over-use of incarceration and promote community safety and healing.

We are so excited that the first set of Clean Slate bills are effective," Safe & Just Michigan's Cooper said. "These reforms are the culmination of years of hard work by many people, and they offer hundreds of thousands of people in Michigan new access to opportunity at a time of great need. We are also very happy to be joined today by political leaders who helped pass this legislation and are now turning to its implementation, and by leaders from our legal services sector who are committed to helping people realize access the opportunities made possible by these reforms."

The Clean Slate legislative package, signed into law on Oct. 12, 2020, is comprised of seven laws, six of which took effect on Sunday, April 11. The laws now in effect concern the process of getting an expungement by petitioning a judge. Changes include allowing traffic offenses to be expunged for the first time ever in Michigan, increased opportunities for the expungement of marijuana offenses, allowing people to receive a greater number of expungements and reducing the

time people must wait before petitioning for an expungement, among others. The final new law, automating the petition process in many cases, won't come into effect until late 2022 at the earliest.

Lt. Gov. Gilchrist supported the Clean Slate legislation in its journey through the legislature, testifying on its behalf before the Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Committee in 2020.

“Clean Slate — and especially the automated part — is an example of the government working for the people,” Lt. Gov. Gilchrist said. He noted that automatic expungement is expected to help half a million Michiganders once it goes into effect next year by lowering barriers between people and basic needs. “That’s 500,000 more people who will have access to jobs, who will have access to housing.”

Passage of the new laws was the culmination of a bipartisan legislative process that drew broad support from both sides of the aisle. Over the past several years, lawmakers from across the political spectrum in Michigan have come together to work on criminal justice reforms that will benefit everyone in our state.

“There is remarkable power behind this Clean Slate legislation,” said Rep. Filler, who was instrumental in shepherding the bills through the Michigan House of Representatives. If you are able to use expungement to improve your prospects of getting a job, I highly encourage that. You now live in a state leading the nation in expungement reform.”

Michigan Supreme Court Chief Justice Bridget McCormack said it took a team of all branches of government, bipartisan lawmakers and criminal justice reform advocates working together to make Clean Slate a reality in Michigan. “We're full of gratitude for the work they wouldn't give up on to get us here,” she said.

Expungement expansion has also found favor in the Attorney General’s office.

“This new law is so necessary,” Attorney General Nessel said, emphasizing the impact of a new law making expungements for marijuana offenses more accessible. “Michigan people deserve to see their records cleared in the wake of legalized marijuana. If you think you are eligible, or you know someone who might be, I encourage you please to visit our website, <http://mi.gov/agexpunge>.”

Clean Slate legislation was drafted with the goal of simplifying the process of receiving an expungement in mind. However, expungement by petition remains a legal process that can be intimidating to people who may lack the means or legal expertise to navigate the court system. The Clean Slate Kickoff introduced new free and low-cost legal resources provided by nonprofit organizations across the state for people who want an expungement. They include:

- **Michigan Legal Help:** <https://michiganlegalhelp.org/self-help-tools/crime-traffic-and-id/i-have-adult-criminal-conviction-i-would-set-aside-expunge>
- **Michigan Legal Aid intake:** https://michiganlegalhelp.org/call_intake_intro_or_888.783.8190

- **Michigan Attorney General Office's Expungement Resources:** mi.gov/agexpunge
- **Michigan Supreme Court Clean Slate website:** <https://courts.michigan.gov/News-Events/Pages/CleanSlate.aspx>
- **City of Detroit's Project Clean Slate (Detroit residents only):**
<https://detroitmi.gov/departments/law-department/project-clean-slate> or 313.237.3024

Getting expungements changes lives, said Project Clean Slate Lead Attorney LaBelle.

“The thing we hear the most is the relief people feel from having the conviction removed, she said. “It's such a huge burden off of them. One client wanted to go on a field trip with daughter but couldn't until he got an expungement. An expungement made it possible.”

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Safe & Just Michigan (www.safeandjustmi.org) works to advance policies that end Michigan's over-use of incarceration and promote community safety and healing. We partner with Michigan organizations and leaders from across the political spectrum, including business and community leaders, faith communities, crime survivor organizations, formerly incarcerated individuals, prisoners and their families, as well as Michigan taxpayers statewide.