



OFFICE OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY ATTORNEY

John J. Choi

February 28, 2024

The Honorable Melissa Hortman
Speaker of the House of Representatives
463 State Office Building
Saint Paul, MN 55155

The Honorable Erin Murphy
Majority Leader of the Senate
3211 Minnesota Senate Building
Saint Paul, MN 55155

The Honorable Kelly Moller
Chair, Public Safety Finance and Policy
509 State Office Building
Saint Paul, MN 55155

The Honorable Ron Latz
Chair, Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Committee
3105 Minnesota Senate Building
Saint Paul, MN 55155

RE: Support for SF 3313 Collateral Consequences of Conviction Model Act

Dear Esteemed Legislative Leaders and Members:

Long after people have atoned for the harm they caused and fulfilled their obligations to the justice system, criminal records and the collateral consequences that follow serve as barriers to jobs, housing, education and more, preventing people from serving as productive members of our community.

According to the FBI, nearly one in three adults in America has a criminal record. Studies have shown very few people who are eligible to seal their records successfully apply, but among those whose records are sealed, very few commit new crimes and, on average, they experience a significant increase in wages and employment within the next two years – a win for them, for our community and our economy.

The traditional way for people to get their records sealed is confusing, cumbersome and expensive. People are required to complete a Petition for Expungement, serve it on all of the related law enforcement agencies, including the Minnesota Department of Public Safety and the Department of Health, and file it by paying a filing fee of \$300 per petition. That is on top of the costs many people incur for private attorneys to help them. Or, if they try to do it on their own, the courts' self-help centers have instructions online... that are 25 pages long. All of this makes sealing criminal records prohibitive for the people who, most likely, would benefit from it the most.

As prosecutors, and ministers of justice, it is our legal and ethical responsibility to help people who have paid their debt to society to remove the scarlet letter of a criminal conviction and the barriers it creates to accessing good-paying jobs, safe housing, education and other necessities in life. In this spirit, we launched www.helpsealmyrecord.org in partnership with Washington and Hennepin County Attorneys' Offices and the State Attorney General to ensure our residents have access to justice by proactively helping people seal their criminal records when they have earned it. Since we first launched in October of

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2019, we have had thousands of Minnesotans apply to remove these barriers to success in their lives. While this is a step in the right direction, it requires significant investments of staff time and energy to determine eligibility and respond to each individual request.

Eliminating unnecessary barriers to life success and active participation in our economy and civil society is a win-win; it helps people secure safe housing, good jobs, further education, and can only enhance community safety and well-being. We support efforts to eradicate unnecessary collateral consequences that are debilitating to members of our community and create a separate class of second-class citizens.

We encourage you to support the Collateral Consequences of Conviction Model Act.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Choi', with a stylized flourish at the end.

John Choi
Ramsey County Attorney