

**MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT OF:
S211A/A1029A**

To: New York State Assembly and Senate

Subject: An act relating to the automatic sealing of certain convictions

Date: May 8, 2023

The League of Women Voters urges enactment of the Clean Slate bill (S.211A/A.1029A). Under this bill, those with a criminal record who have served their period of incarceration and lived for a fixed period of time without interaction with the criminal justice system would have their record automatically sealed. It would mean that a criminal conviction would no longer cause an individual seeking to live a constructive life to be faced with never ending barriers.

The impact of a criminal conviction does not end upon an individual's release from incarceration. Those formerly incarcerated face significant difficulties in obtaining housing, healthcare and, most importantly, employment. For example, an incarcerated person who became proficient at barbering while in prison was denied a barber's license after his release, thereby denying him the ability to be employed with the skills he had learned. This is the type of restriction that more than two million New Yorkers currently face in trying to put their criminal activities behind them¹.

The bill would not only improve the lives of those directly affected by its provisions, but it would also be of great benefit to employers who are today in dire need of employees eager to work. That is why the bill is supported by entities such as the Business Council of New York, Verizon, Microsoft and JP Morgan Chase². It also has the support of many unions across the state that see enhanced employment opportunities.

The bill provides for the sealing of the records of those convicted of a misdemeanor after three years and of those convicted of a felony after seven years as long they have not had any further interaction with the criminal justice system. There are exceptions that allow access to sealed records in defined circumstances. Among those entitled to see such records are law enforcement agencies, the courts, the department of education and government entities that issue licenses. There is a specific exception allowing the unsealing of the record of an individual who applies for a gun permit.

¹ <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/clean-slate-act-can-build-more-prosperous-new-york>
² <https://www.cleanslateny.org/steering-committee>

The Clean Slate bill passed in the Senate in 2022. It is now time to enact this bill before the conclusion of the 2023 session, thereby lifting the burdens now faced by those who have served their sentences and are trying to rebuild their lives.

For the above reasons, the League of Women Voters of New York State urges the Senate and Assembly to pass the bill (S211A/A1029A) this session.