

FRESHSTART COALITION NOUVEAU DÉPART

'FRESH START' COALITION LAUNCHES CAMPAIGN FOR CRIMINAL RECORD REFORM

November 17, 2021

TORONTO — The 'Fresh Start' Coalition launched a campaign today urging the federal government to revamp the way Canada deals with old criminal records.

A coalition of over 60 civil society groups has come together to call on the federal government to implement a 'spent regime', which would automatically seal a person's criminal record if they have successfully completed their sentence and lived in the community without further criminal convictions. Adopting a spent regime will promote reintegration and workforce participation and improve community safety.

The Canadian government knows change is needed. In 2016, it began to make promises to reform Canada's arcane criminal record suspension regime. Over five years later, Canadians are still waiting for change, and vulnerable people continue to suffer. It is a situation that deepens systemic inequality, jeopardizes community safety, and places needless barriers in front of job-seekers – at a time when Canadian employers are desperate for help.

"Today, we are calling on the Canadian government to finally deliver real reform to the record suspension system by doing away with the unnecessary and complicated application process. Record suspensions should be automatic for those who have successfully completed their sentence and lived in the community for years," said Abby Deshman, Criminal Justice Program Director with the Canadian Civil Liberties Association. "The current system is broken - and is placing unnecessary and at times insurmountable barriers to recovery and reintegration in front of people struggling to rebuild their lives."

"Implementing a spent regime would be a concrete step towards addressing anti-Black racism in the criminal justice system, in the workplace, and beyond. It would help

ensure that Black people who have been caught up in the criminal justice system are not forever trapped in it, and have a better chance at getting jobs, homes, and an education,” said Moya Teklu, Executive Director of the Black Legal Action Centre.

"Those of us who work with survivors of gender-based violence in the family see all too often the long-term, negative consequences for those who are criminalized when they attempt to protect themselves and their children,” said Pam Cross, Legal Director for Luke’s Place. “A criminal conviction record can interfere with a woman's ability to get or keep a job, travel or volunteer. She may even be prohibited from volunteering in her child's class or on school field trips. Transforming Canada's record suspension system will end these problems for survivors while also enhancing public safety. It's a win-win."

“A more efficient, less costly, and less arbitrary records management system will correct the unfairness for those who are entitled to relief but have been denied it due to marginalization and poverty,” said Catherine Latimer, Executive Director of the John Howard Society. “Such a system is already working well for youth records in Canada and should be applied to adult records.”

“For women, trans, and non-binary people, surviving poverty is often the reason that they become ensnared in the criminal system, and the stigma associated with a criminal record serves to keep them there”, said Emilie Coyle, Executive Director of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies. “Record suspensions are currently only accessible to people who have the means to pay for them and, when you can’t afford to pay for a record suspension – as is true for so many of the people we work with – the impact of your criminalization is prolonged. The practical implication is that those people who can’t afford to pay for a record suspension are being further penalized for being poor. This is but one example of the ways that the current record suspension regime is harmful. Everyone should have access to justice and implementing a spent record regime will help to get us there.”

“The stigma of a criminal record jeopardizes the future of those Indigenous people who hope to pursue gainful employment and to secure a place within their respective communities as active participants. Indigenous people particularly suffer from the residual burdens of criminal records as a result of their disproportionate representation in Canada's criminal justice system. Implementing a regime by which record suspensions will be automatic, as envisioned by the Fresh Start Coalition, helps to alleviate these burdens,” concluded Drew Lafond, President of the Indigenous Bar Association.

About the Fresh Start Coalition

Over 60 organizations have signed onto the coalition which has a diverse membership of mental health organizations, violence against women organizations, poverty advocates, Indigenous- and Black-led organizations, and more.

For more information, visit www.freshstartcoalition.ca

The groups joining the call today include:

- Alliance for Healthier Communities
- Aboriginal Legal Services
- Assaulted Women's Helpline (AWHL)
- Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic
- Bethesda House
- Black Community Action Network Peel
- Black Legal Action Centre
- British Columbia Civil Liberties Association
- Canadian Association of Black Lawyers
- Canadian Associations of Elizabeth Fry Societies
- Canadian Civil Liberties Association
- Canadian Council of Muslim Women
- Canadian Mental Health Association National
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- Canadian Prison Law Association
- Cannabis Amnesty
- The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
- Criminal Lawyers' Association
- The Elizabeth Fry Society of Cape Breton
- Elizabeth Fry Society of Kamloops
- Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland Nova Scotia
- Elizabeth Fry Society of New Brunswick
- Elizabeth Fry Society of Newfoundland and Labrador
- Elizabeth Fry Society of Northern Alberta
- Elizabeth Fry Society of North-Eastern Ontario
- Elizabeth Fry Society of Saskatchewan
- Elizabeth Fry Toronto
- Elliot Lake Women's Group Inc.
- Empowerment Council
- Halton Community Legal Clinic
- Health Justice Program
- HIV & AIDS Legal Clinic Ontario
- HIV Legal Aid Network
- Hope 24/7
- Huron Women's Shelter
- Inasmuch House & Women's Services, Mission Services of Hamilton
- Indigenous Bar Association
- John Howard Society of Canada

- John Howard Society of New Brunswick
- John Howard Society of Ontario
- John Howard Society of Saskatchewan
- Kinna-aweya Legal Clinic
- Lanark County Interval House
- Luke's Place
- Mothers Offering Mutual Support (MOMS)
- Muskoka Parry Sound Sexual Assault Services
- Neighbourhood Legal Services
- Network of Women with Disabilities (NOW)
- Niagara Community Legal Clinic
- Ontario Alliance to End Homelessness
- Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH)
- Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres
- Ottawa Coalition To End Violence Against Women (OCTEVAW)
- PASAN
- Peel Alliance to End Homelessness
- Prisoners' Legal Services
- Pro Bono Law Saskatchewan
- Queen's Prison Law Clinic
- Resolve Counselling Services
- Saint John Learning Exchange
- The Social Economy Through Social Inclusion Coalition (SETSI)
- The Women & Children's Shelter (Barrie)
- Thunder Woman Healing Lodge Society
- Timmins and Area Women in Crisis
- Toronto Prisoners' Rights Project
- Victim Services of Durham Region
- Women's Shelter Canada
- YWCA Cambridge

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