

# YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES ACT

## REMOVING BARRIERS FOR REHABILITATED YOUTH

"Keanu's record remains open and available for public viewing, even though all the charges against him were dismissed.

Looking at his record is extremely confusing for someone who is not used to reading court documents - it is almost impossible to understand.

His open public record will keep him shackled to a false accusation for life.

There will be a constant ball and chain as a reminder that he was once involved in the juvenile justice system, and as a barrier to his professional and personal life.

### **This must change.**

Keanu and many other children deserve to be productive members of society and leave their childhood memories or mistakes behind as they move into adulthood."

The Washington State juvenile justice system is founded upon the core principle of rehabilitation. Society benefits when rehabilitated youth reintegrate into society and become law-abiding and contributing members of their communities. A major barrier to reintegration is the widespread dissemination and easy public access to juvenile court records in our state.

### **Washington's Current Policies Prevent Youth From Reintegrating into Society**

- Having a public juvenile offense record can prevent youth from obtaining education, employment, and housing - leading to a **cycle of poverty, homelessness, and crime**.
- In Washington, court records of any alleged juvenile offense are **open to the public and disseminated online** - even if the charges were dismissed.
- Washington is one of only eight states where juvenile records are open and published online. As a result, **Washington's youth are at a disadvantage compared to youth from other states**.
- A youth can petition the court to have his or her record sealed, but the process is costly, lengthy, and difficult to navigate without an attorney. Furthermore, **once a record has been put online, it can never truly be sealed**.
- Our current records policies have a **discriminatory impact on minority youth**.

### **SSB 5689 is a Step in the Right Direction! It Will Diminish this Great Barrier to Success By:**

- Restricting public access to juvenile records containing **nonconviction data**, which includes information about:
  - Arrests, probable cause hearings, citations, charges, and services of warrants relating to incidents that did not lead to a conviction.
  - Charges resulting in dismissal; and
  - Charges resulting in acquittal.

### **The Youth Opportunities Act Will Give Our State's Youth a Chance at Success**

- It allows youth who have been involved in the early stages of the juvenile justice system to pursue educational, employment, and housing opportunities without being shackled by childhood mistakes.
- It benefits society by promoting employment amongst Washington's youth, enabling them to contribute to the economy.



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