

SSB 5689

# 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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