

HB 1651  
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SB 5689

# YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES ACT

REMOVING BARRIERS FOR REHABILITATED YOUTH

When barred from important opportunities, youth can become trapped in a cycle of poverty and homelessness.

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Actual email received by a legal service provider:

"Hi My Name is Dana\*

I am a former foster child who aged out of care in 2010.

I am currently homeless, without employment and without education.

I am running into problems getting a job due to a juvenile court record.

I had a felony at the age of 14 and have fines in the amount of \$750.

If I can't seal my record, I can't get a job. If I can't get a job, I can't get a home. If I can't get a home, I can't pay for a GED.

I need your help."

\* Name changed to protect anonymity

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**.

## The Youth Opportunities Act Will Diminish this Barrier to Success, While Promoting Public Safety By:

- Prohibiting courts from disseminating, selling, or making public juvenile offense records, **EXCEPT** for the records of a youth that was convicted of a serious violent offense.
- Prohibiting private individuals and entities from accessing juvenile offense records, while allowing access by courts, prosecutors, and law enforcement.
- Maintaining the openness of juvenile court proceedings.

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

- It allows youth to pursue educational, employment, and other opportunities without being shackled by childhood mistakes.
- It benefits society by promoting employment amongst Washington's youth, enabling them to contribute to the economy.



Columbia Legal Services

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