



# **Rauner signs series of criminal justice bills**

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CHICAGO – Gov. Bruce Rauner today signed a series of criminal justice bills. The six bills emphasize his commitment to reforming Illinois’ criminal justice system and providing offenders a second chance.



“One of my most important goals since taking office has been to fix our broken criminal justice system,” Gov. Rauner said. “Our work is far from over, but these bills are a step in the right direction toward reducing recidivism and giving people a second chance at life.”

All of the bills signed today will help offenders obtain jobs and safe housing upon their release, thereby reducing the likelihood of re-incarceration. When Gov. Rauner took office, he set a goal of reducing the prison population 25 percent by 2025. As of August, the prison population declined 11 percent since Gov. Rauner assumed office.

The governor signed the following bills:

### **SB 1688**

Senate Bill 1688 will safely reduce unnecessary and broad conviction-based occupational licensing barriers. It will enable people with arrest and conviction records to secure gainful employment, thereby reducing the high rate of recidivism in Illinois.

“Too often individuals are denied the opportunity to turn their lives around because they are kept from receiving the necessary licensing required to secure employment opportunities because of a criminal background and this new law aims to end this reality,” said Rep. Elgie Sims. “Individuals with criminal backgrounds want a second chance and the opportunity to provide a better life for themselves and their families and under this new law we are able to give them more access and the opportunity to provide a better life for themselves and their families.”

### **SB 1781**

Senate Bill 1781 extends for one year the waiver of the \$120 fee for criminal record expungement application by individuals in Cook County whose charges were eventually dropped. The Cook County Sheriff’s Department supports the bill. “With the elimination of this fee, we’re giving people an opportunity to restore their name and a better shot at obtaining long-term stability in the form of employment or a better housing situation,” said Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart.

“Reforming our criminal justice requires a sustained commitment and is a long process and today we’ve taken another step forward by extending this pilot program for another year,” said Rep. Elgie Sims. “We’ve found that individuals who come in contact with our criminal justice system often come from low-income backgrounds and by waiving the fees to expunge or seal their criminal records we give those individuals the opportunity to get their lives back on track.”

## **HB 2373**

House Bill 2373 amends the Criminal Identification Act, allowing the court to seal the records of those who have been arrested or charged and received an order of supervision or a conviction of non-violent, non-sexual crimes. The bill prevents courts from sealing the records of people who are required to remain on criminal registries and those charged or convicted of offenses that fall under the Humane Care for Animals Act.

“This law allows individuals returning to communities to access housing, education and training opportunities, employment and a chance for a real future,” said Rep. Camille Lilly. “Now we must begin the hard work to ensure that this returning population has access to available medical, mental health and counseling treatment following their probation and eligibility period to apply for criminal records sealing. The bi-partisan support of this bill should be celebrated.”

## **HB 698**

House Bill 698 creates the Prisoner Entrepreneur Education Program Law. This bill initiates a 5-year pilot project that allows offenders to gain entrepreneurial skills while incarcerated so they can be equipped for success upon release. Participants will be taught business skills such as computer skills, budgeting, creating a business plan, public speaking and realistic goal setting. Those who successfully complete the program will be awarded a certificate of completion. Additionally, the program may establish post-release assistance to individuals who receive a certificate. To participate in the program, offenders must never have been convicted of a major sex offense, vulnerable victim sex offense or child pornography.

"It is important for our state to do all it can to create opportunities for ex-offenders to be productive and successful citizens," said Rep. Justin Slaughter. "HB698 is a first of its kind initiative in Illinois that will spark entrepreneurship amongst ex-offenders and stimulate our economy."

## **HB 514:**

House Bill 514 makes changes to the Criminal Identification Act to allow for the immediate sealing of records containing charges that result in an acquittal or dismissal upon the final disposition of the case.

“The tide is turning in Illinois, and the arc of the moral universe is bending a little closer towards justice,” said Rep. La Shawn Ford. "This bill corrects an unjust practice in our criminal justice system—I applaud Governor Rauner for signing it into law.”

## **HB 3817:**

House Bill 3817 creates the Youth Opportunity and Fairness Act. Under current Illinois law, only 3 in 1,000 juvenile arrests are expunged. The Youth Opportunity and Fairness Act would lessen the difficulty of juvenile arrest record expungement. This law would allow for a quicker and easier process for young people to have their records erased, would reduce the unlawful sharing of juvenile records, and would align Illinois law more closely with the American Bar Association's guidelines on juvenile records. This Act would benefit young people who are burdened by juvenile arrest records when they seek employment and housing.

"This legislation is another important step in assuring that bad decisions by youths do not create permanent and insurmountable hurdles to employment, housing and education," said Rep. Elaine Nekritz. "The laws should help people move on with their lives, not trap them in the criminal justice system."