Land Of Lincoln Legal Aid Will Host A Virtual Expungement Day

September 16 2020 10:33 AM

ALTON- Land of Lincoln Legal Aid will be hosting a Virtual Madison County Expungement Week online during the week of September 21-25, 2020. This free online event will allow individuals with criminal records to begin the process of attempting to clear their records, while also having the opportunity to learn about job training, educational opportunities, financial literacy, and more.

Madison County Employment and Training, Lewis and Clark Community College, The Dream Center, and Regions Bank are partnering with Land of Lincoln for this event.

At noon of each day during the week, a different community partner will be doing an online presentation about services they offer that could help individuals with criminal records obtain economic security. These online presentations will be accessible through the Land of Lincoln’s Facebook page: facebook.com/lincolnlegalaid/

Land of Lincoln’s Facebook page will also be linking to an online form that people can fill out to begin the expungement and sealing process. After the information is entered into the form, the Land of Lincoln staff will determine whether the individuals are eligible for record-clearing assistance from Land of Lincoln.

An expungement is a legal court order that destroys a criminal record and removes it from public view. Records that cannot be expunged because they resulted in convictions may be eligible to be sealed. Sealing limits who has access to the records. It may be several months from when a petition for expungement and sealing is filed until a decision is made by a judge.

Daniel R. Kuehnert, a senior staff attorney with Land of Lincoln, said that criminal records often prevent people from landing a job or getting a higher paying job. “

The mistake you make at 18 years old shouldn’t prevent you from getting a job when you’re 40,” Kuehnert said. “A criminal record can be a major barrier in seeking employment, housing and education.

Kuehnert said it is more beneficial to society to allow citizens the opportunity to work and live productive lives than to be held back by youthful missteps resulting in an arrest or conviction

He said that although Illinois law prevents a potential employer from asking someone if they have been arrested on a job application, as someone moves further into the process of being hired, a background check may still show the arrest.

“By clearing their criminal histories as much as possible, people are granted freedom to seek better opportunities to improve their lives,” he said

For the past several years, Land of Lincoln has helped organize large, in-person expungement events in Madison County each fall, which allowed dozens of people to file their expungement/sealing petitions at one time. Although such an in-person event is not possible this year due to the restrictions on large events because of the coronavirus pandemic, Madison County Virtual Expungement Week builds on the tradition of those events.

“The pandemic and the economic downturn are making it harder for anybody who is looking for work right now. For people with a criminal record, they have an extra burden that makes the struggle even more difficult. That’s why Land of Lincoln feels it is very important to do an expungement event this year, even if it can’t be done in

person. With our wide variety of community partners at the event, we hope it will give individuals with criminal records several tools to help work towards economic security," Kuehnert said.

Madison County Virtual Expungement Week is taking part in National Expungement Week, September 19-26, when community organizations across the country are putting on events dedicated to increasing opportunities for expungement and other criminal records relief.

This event is part of Land of Lincoln's Fresh Start Project, which assists people who have been involved with the criminal justice system. In addition to expungement and sealing, the Fresh Start Project also assists recently incarcerated individuals with other types of civil legal issues. The Fresh Start Project is supported by funding from the Westside Justice Center-Access to Justice initiative.