

MORE THAN A MILLION CALIFORNIANS GAIN ELIGIBILITY TO HAVE OLD CONVICTION RECORDS SEALED AFTER GOV. GAVIN NEWSOM SIGNS LANDMARK SB 731

California now has most expansive post-conviction relief law in nation's history; law enhances public safety by enabling people living with a past conviction to positively contribute to our communities and economy

SACRAMENTO, Calif. – California on Thursday became the first state in American history to allow almost all old convictions on a person's criminal record to be permanently sealed, after Gov. Gavin Newsom signed the landmark Senate Bill 731 into law.

Well over a million Californians will now have the opportunity to be unburdened, in many cases for the first time in decades, by an old conviction record in the pursuit of gainful employment, stable housing, educational opportunities and other keys to public safety, family stability and economic security.

"California now has the most comprehensive record sealing system in the nation," said Jay Jordan, chief operating officer of the Alliance for Safety and Justice, the national sponsor organization of Californians for Safety and Justice, which has been at the forefront of some of the state's most significant justice reforms during the past decade. "Millions of Californians will now be able to contribute to this state and its economy, freed from the thousands of counterproductive yet permanent restrictions to opportunity that serve only to destabilize families and undermine our collective safety."

SB 731, authored by Sen. María Elena Durazo (D-Los Angeles), creates a comprehensive process to electronically seal conviction and arrest records in the state of California once a person has fully completed their sentence and successfully gone four years without further contact with the justice system. Records of arrests that didn't result in a conviction would also be electronically sealed.

Records relating to registrable sex offenses cannot be sealed. And conviction histories still must be shared with law enforcement, the Commission on Teacher Credentialing, school districts and other educational institutions, as well as others in high sensitivity contexts.

"Eight million people in California are living with an arrest or conviction on their record. Preventing people with a past conviction from positively contributing to their communities is a leading driver of recidivism, destabilizes families, undermines our economy, and makes our communities less safe," said Sen. Durazo. "The State of California and local governments invest billions of dollars into rehabilitative services, but if all we do is exclude people from any kind of opportunity to build a new life for themselves, we are simply wasting that money. Millions of Californians are unable to reach their full employment and economic potential due to having an old conviction or arrest record. SB 731 will give individuals the tools to turn the page on their past and an opportunity to build a new, better life while providing an economic boost in California, including an estimated \$20 billion yearly increase to our state's gross domestic product that it currently misses out on from widespread unemployment and under employment of those with a conviction history. I am grateful to Governor Newsom for signing this bill to help uplift millions of people and their communities."

SB 731 built upon 2019's AB 1076, authored by Asm. Phil Ting, (D-San Francisco), which allowed for the automatic sealing of old misdemeanor convictions, and felony convictions that didn't result in prison incarceration. The new law extends automatic sealing to non-violent, non-serious, non-sexual felony convictions that did result in a sentence of prison incarceration and allows people convicted of more serious felonies to petition a judge to have their old conviction sealed.

“SB 731 is about rehabilitation and supporting people to reach their full potential,” said Fr. Gregory Boyle, S.J., the founder of Homeboy Industries, which sponsored a piece of legislation for the first time in the organization’s illustrious history. “We support progressive policies such as this, that reduce barriers to employment and housing, and increase opportunities for individuals to heal and transform their lives. Every human being deserves a second chance to rebuild, because people are much more than the worst thing they have ever done. And, this is a second chance felt not only by the person who has served their time, and completed their sentence, it is also about their families and breaking generational cycles, leading to healthier and more just communities.”

The Alliance for Safety and Justice estimates at least 225,000 Californians will have an old conviction automatically sealed as a result of the new law, and more than a million Californians will be eligible to petition a judge.

“Too many people are out of work because of past felony convictions. These unfair restrictions have held our community members back and limited their vision of success during reentry,” said Sam Lewis, executive director of the Anti-Recidivism Coalition (ARC). “Our members simply want a chance to find better jobs that can turn into fruitful careers so they can be self-sufficient and provide for their families. SB 731 marks a fantastic opportunity for people coming home to prove themselves and have the hope one day they can seal their record.”

Nationally, 70 million Americans are living with an old criminal conviction or record that can permanently block them from getting jobs, housing, educational opportunities and other keys to attaining economic security and family stability. This is true despite the fact that many people with convictions were never incarcerated and have been crime free for years or even decades. Yet they still face nearly 50,000 different legal restrictions that can restrict economic mobility and permanently push people to the margins of society.

“With the signing of SB 731 into law, we have sent a strong message to the currently and formerly incarcerated communities in California,” said Charles Vignola, public policy and community engagement manager for the Los Angeles Regional Reentry Partnership. “We have told these groups that an individual is more than their conviction, and that one can move beyond the labels traditionally assigned to those who have been incarcerated. We look forward to continuing to develop pathways to full community engagement for every Californian, and celebrate this success alongside the entire reentry community.”

In California alone, eight million people – one in five state residents – are living with a past conviction or record. As a result, they face nearly 5,000 legal restrictions, many of which are employment related and 73 percent of which are permanent.

“Legal Services for Prisoners with Children and All of Us or None are proud co-sponsors of SB 731. We are grateful for Gov. Newsom’s signature on this important legislation and to Sen. Durazo for her tireless leadership in the California legislature,” said Dorsey Nunn, executive director of Legal Services for Prisoners with Children and founder of All of Us or None. “This bill is an integral step forward and we are determined to continue breaking down the barriers that stand between our people and true justice, equity and redemption.”

Eight in 10 people with a past conviction [say they have experienced hurdles to success](#), including barriers to job opportunities, housing, education, adopting or fostering a child, volunteering at their child’s school or joining its PTA, as well as accessing crime victim services.

“The passage of SB 731 is a common sense step that will address some of the ongoing harm from over incarceration in California,” said Khalid Alexander, executive director of Pillars of the Community. “SB 731 prioritizes safety and community over draconian punishment and economic barriers. Pillars of the Community is proud to have played a role in this monumental bill.”

The new law will provide a much-needed and major economic boost to California, curbing the estimated \$20 billion in yearly gross domestic product that the state currently loses due to the widespread unemployment and underemployment of people living with a past conviction.

In conjunction with SB 731’s introduction last year, Californians for Safety and Justice and UNITE-LA released a report, [“Getting Back to Work: Revamping the Economy by Removing Past Records,”](#) providing a clear picture of the scale of economic harm caused by these barriers faced by people living with an old conviction.

The report shows that in 2018:

- 2.5 million working-age Californians were living with a felony record
- The state lost \$20 billion (in 2021 dollars) in gross domestic product – the total value of goods produced and services provided – due to the barriers preventing people living with a past felony legal record from gaining full employment and contributing to the economy
- The Los Angeles region alone lost more than \$9 billion from their GDP, and eight Bay Area counties lost over \$4 billion from their economic output.
- Five counties in the central valley region lost nearly \$1.5 billion in GDP
- Sacramento and three neighboring counties lost nearly \$800 million from their GDP

“This law will end the systematic disenfranchisement and employment barriers faced by millions of Californians living with an old conviction record that disproportionately affects people of color and costs the state approximately \$20 billion every year in economic activity,” said Tinisch Hollins, executive director of Californians for Safety and Justice. “Rather than keeping us safe, the thousands of permanent post-conviction restrictions faced by Californians living with an old conviction record make it harder for them to rebuild productive and full lives.”

SB 731 was sponsored by Californians for Safety and Justice, Homeboy industries – the first time in the storied organization’s history that it sponsored legislation – Anti-Recidivism Coalition, Legal Services for Prisoners with Children, Time for Change Foundation, A New Way of Life, Pillars of the Community and the Los Angeles Regional Re-entry Project. Earlier this year, more than 90 support organizations sent a letter to state legislators calling for the bill’s passage.

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