

CLEARING THE PATH: HOW CALIFORNIA IS LEADING THE NATION ON RECORD RELIEF

Californians for Safety and Justice | August 2026



Nearly one in five Californians (an estimated 8 million people) are living with an old criminal conviction that closes doors to jobs, housing, educational opportunities, parental and civil rights, and the freedom to live and work without restriction. When people can move past old records, families stabilize, communities strengthen, and economies grow.

For over a decade, Californians for Safety and Justice has helped build one of the most ambitious record relief systems in the country and the results are beginning to show.

Building the Infrastructure for Relief: Californians for Safety and Justice's Work Across California

Californians for Safety and Justice has led a statewide record-clearing initiative that combines direct legal services with strategic community partnerships to remove barriers to employment, housing, education, and economic mobility for Californians living with old criminal records. Through expungement clinics, college-based workshops, workforce development events, faith-led community convenings, and innovative digital tools such as ExpungeMyRecord.org, Californians for Safety and Justice has expanded access to record relief while raising awareness of the systemic barriers justice-impacted individuals face.

By integrating record clearance with workforce development, higher education, professional licensing, housing access, and community organizing, these efforts have advanced a comprehensive model of public safety rooted in opportunity, restoration, and long-term community well-being.

What Relief Is Available Today

Thanks to a decade of progress, most Californians with old records now qualify for relief, often automatically, without ever filing a petition.

- **Automatic arrest and conviction relief:** For eligible arrest and conviction records, the California Department of Justice grants relief automatically without requiring a court filing and at no cost to the individual.
- **Retroactive relief:** This automatic relief now reaches back to 1973, meaning even decades-old eligible records can be cleared.
- **Expanded relief:** For records that don't qualify automatically, there are more records eligible, including convictions that resulted in prison sentences, such that individuals can petition the court for expungement.
- **Relief without financial barriers:** Outstanding restitution or fines can no longer be used to deny someone's petition for relief.

Today, 90% of Californians with a record are eligible for relief. This progress marks an ongoing shift away from a system that stalled people in costly, confusing court processes while draining time and resources from courts and counties. This progress reflects bold legislation, coalition building, the relentless leadership of people directly impacted, and continued investment in implementation, work that is far from finished.

The Economic Case for Record Clearance

Old convictions act as a hidden tax on economic mobility, blocking people from licensed professions, limiting access to small business loans, and suppressing lifetime earnings. And the economic stakes are just as clear. An analysis by Californians for Safety and Justice and Unite-LA found that felony conviction records cost California \$20 billion in GDP each year. Meanwhile, clearing records demonstrably reverses the damage. A Harvard Law Review study found wages rise by more than 22% within one year of expungement, driven largely by unemployed people finding jobs and minimally employed people finding steadier or higher-paying work.

Paving the Road to Relief: Californians for Safety and Justice A Decade of Leadership

Pre-2018

- Prop 47, the Safe Neighborhoods and Schools Act, passes as a voter initiative, reclassifying certain low-level drug and property offenses from felonies to misdemeanors (Nov. 2014)
- Prop 47 Record Change and Resources Fair at Exposition Park
- Prop 47 Record Change & Justice Fair at San Joaquin Delta College

2018

- Launch TimeDone initiative with an expungement clinic and a concert headlined by Nipsey Hussle

2019

- AB 1076 signed. Automatic relief for eligible arrest and conviction records with no petition required
- AB 1331. Mandates statewide criminal justice data reporting
- TimeDone Advocacy Day. Wall of Collateral Consequences

2020

- SB 118. Adjusts AB 1076 implementation timeline

2021

- AB 1076 takes effect (Jan. 1)
- SB 731. Expands automatic relief to most felonies
- AB 145. Retroactive expungement relief
- TimeDone Advocacy Day. Legislative visits and literature drops

2022

- SB 1106. Bars restitution debt as grounds for relief denial
- TimeDone Advocacy Day. Cubes of Collateral Consequences

2023

- SB 763. Makes SB 731 relief retroactive to 1973
- AB 567. Provides automated relief for revoked misdemeanor probation and infractions, and allows an individual to request confirmation from the DOJ that relief was granted
- SB 749. Removes filing deadline for Prop 47 resentencing
- TimeDone Advocacy Day. Legislative visits and lit drops

2024

- AB 168. Clarifies CADOJ identity confirmation process of automatic relief; moves certain implementation deadlines to October 1, 2024; and extends retroactivity under 1203.425 to January 1, 1973
- Launched Expungemyrecord.org with Re-Entry Providers Association of California and Root & Rebound
- TimeDone Advocacy Day. Legislative visits and lit drops

2025

- SB 245. Streamlines expungement for fire camp/conservation program participants
- TimeDone Advocacy Day. Expungement Clinic and Live Scan on State Capitol lawn
- April 24, 2025 - Shared Safety Compton "Breaking Barriers" Expungement Clinic
- May 18, 2025 - Shared Safety Oakland "Barber Battle" Expungement Clinic

2026

- Californians for Safety and Justice launches the California Record Clearance Coalition, a statewide table of reentry and legal service providers to surface implementation challenges, elevate promising practices, and translate frontline experience into actionable policy solutions
- TimeDone Advocacy Day. Voter Registration and Live Scan at the State Capitol

On the Ground: Closing the Awareness Gap with TimeDone Clinics and Events

- Most people with an eligible record don't know relief exists, how to access it, or that it could be automatic. Awareness is the single biggest barrier. Californians for Safety and Justice closes that gap at scale through our statewide network, TimeDone.
- We use social media to connect people to Live Scan events, where they can pull a complete CADOJ record, then we follow up through our membership network to bring expungement clinics directly to their region. (We've seen people travel hundreds of miles to reach one.) At a clinic, people complete a Live Scan, begin the expungement process, and/or get clarity on eligibility, with TimeDone staying with them through the process.
- This localized, consistent presence does double duty by building word-of-mouth awareness in the community, and giving local officials and agency partners a firsthand view of post-conviction poverty's impact.

Miles to Go: The Road Ahead

A gap remains between eligibility in law and relief felt by Californians. Building on the foundation of the laws enacted, Californians for Safety and Justice is actively working to close these gaps with partners across the state. This includes advancing legislation that would further advance record clearance in California:

- **SB 1342**, which fixes implementation barriers like outdated pending charges, mismatched court and DOJ records, and lack of proof of relief;
- **AB 2384**, which allows sealing of non-conviction arrest records and eligible convictions after a four-year waiting period; and
- **SB 1057**, which aligns DPH licensing standards with other healing professions so people with past records can access patient care careers.

**To ensure every eligible Californian can access relief, we need partners at every level.
To support this work, visit us at www.expungemyrecord.org and www.safeandjust.org.**

¹ Californians for Safety and Justice and UNITE-LA, Getting Back to Work: Revamping the Economy by Removing Past Records (March 2021). Available at <https://justsafe.org/resources/getting-back-work/>.

² J.J. Prescott & Sonja B. Starr, "Expungement of Criminal Convictions: An Empirical Study," *Harvard Law Review* 133:8 (June 2020), 2460. Available at [Expungement of Criminal Convictions: An Empirical Study](https://www.harvardlawreview.org/expungement-of-criminal-convictions-an-empirical-study/) - Harvard Law Review.