



A SOLUTION BY



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Public Testimony on S.2800 to the House Ways and Means and Judiciary Committees

Dear Chair Cronin, Chair Michlewitz, Vice Chair Day, and Vice Chair Garlick,

I am writing to request your consideration to expand the existing expungement law (MGL Ch 276, Section 100E) as the House takes up S.2800 to address Racial Justice and Police Accountability. S.2800 is important to our work at College Bound Dorchester as we work to move heavily gang involved individuals from the corner and into college and back into their communities as agents of change through our Boston Uncornered model.

The vast majority of our students, 99% of whom are people of color, experience arrest and detention in the juvenile justice system many times before they reach our program. We know that young people have the highest recidivism of any age group and that by the time they have grown older and matured, that rate drops, but their past remains a barrier to their adult lives.

The individuals we serve have made poor decisions in their youth that have had devastating effects on their communities, regardless of their arrest record, and they are working with us because they are determined to turn their lives around and stop the cycles of violence and poverty that have plagued their own lives, often for many generations. Our students work with our College Readiness Advisors (CRAs), formerly gang involved individuals who serve as mentors and change agents in their own neighborhoods. Our students work on doing everything they can to break the cycle, however, the way the laws are currently structured means that even an adult who has been doing everything "right" for many years may be unable to continue on a path to success.

A common example: a student who is in our program, has obtained a GED, worked with their College Readiness Advisor to address their previously unmet social and emotional needs, has completed an Associate's degree and then may be told they are not eligible for an entry level position after graduation simply because of their juvenile record from many years ago. Criminal records are meant to be a tool for public safety but they're more often used as a tool to hold communities of color back from their full economic potential. Expungement can be an important tool to rectify the documented systemic racism at every point of a young person's journey through and past our justice system.

Refining the law will adequately achieve the desired outcome from 2018: to reduce recidivism, to remove barriers to employment, education, and housing; and to allow people of color who are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system and who disproportionately experience the collateral consequences of a criminal record the opportunity to move on with their lives and contribute in powerfully positive ways to the Commonwealth and the communities they live, work and raise families in. Within a system riddled with racial disparities, the final step in the process is to allow for as many people as possible who pose no risk to public safety and who are passionate to pursue a positive future, to achieve that full potential here in Massachusetts or anywhere.

Thank you for your consideration,

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