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EDITORS: The following is for immediate release. For further information please contact Rebecca Brain, Communications Coordinator, at 610-344-6279 or at rbrain@chesco.org.

Chester County begins implementation of Clean Slate legislation

WEST CHESTER, PA _Chester County has joined all other counties across the state of Pennsylvania in automatically sealing non-violent criminal records and non-convictions for anyone who has remained crime-free for 10 years. The sealing of the records is part of the “Clean Slate” legislation, and Pennsylvania is the first state in the nation to enact it.

Because of the Clean Slate legislation, no longer will people have to file motions and pay to seal their records, as long as they meet the Clean Slate criteria.

The responsibility to seal all eligible records within Chester County falls to the County’s Clerk of Courts Office. Chester County Clerk of Courts Yolanda Van de Krol said, “In Chester County alone, two million people will have their low-level offenses or non-convictions automatically sealed in the next year. That means we are sealing about 163,000 cases every month for the next year to clean up the backlog of cases.

“It is very exciting to be at the forefront of this type of criminal justice reform. Because of Clean Slate, a mistake will no longer define a person’s life and limit their opportunities,” added Van de Krol.

Van de Krol also points out that the records will not be expunged. They will remain visible to law enforcement and judicial officers and can still be seen on FBI background checks, used by schools, hospitals and casinos. If anyone qualifies for an expungement, she highly urges them to apply for one, as their record will be destroyed rather than simply sealed.

“The Clean Slate legislation is designed to give people with a non-violent offense and a decade of crime-free life a chance to compete for better jobs,” said Chester County Commissioners’ Chair Michelle Kichline. “It is also valuable for counties like ours, where the unemployment rate is low, because it will open up opportunities for more people to participate in the workforce with skills that we need.”

Chester County Commissioner Kathi Cozzone commented, “Although it will take a great amount of time over the coming year to seal all of the retroactive files, ultimately the Clean Slate legislation will mean less bureaucracy, less red tape. More importantly, it will help prevent a lesser criminal charge that was received 10 years ago from becoming a much longer ‘sentence’ that prevents good job opportunities.”

Commissioner Terence Farrell added, “It is unusual to find instances where criminal justice reform legislation directly impacts the business community in a positive way. Chester County business leaders are always looking for dependable, qualified workers and implementing Clean Slate means that the older, minor or unfounded charges are sealed and do not follow anyone into a job interview.”

The Clean Slate legislation passed in July of 2018. The first phase began in December and allowed for people who had old misdemeanors on their records and who had not been in trouble for a decade to apply for their records to be sealed. Chester County is in the top five counties in Pennsylvania for volume of cases.

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