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Governor Christie Announces Bipartisan Agreement on Model Legislation to Reclaim Lives

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TRENTON, NJ – Governor Chris Christie announced today a bipartisan agreement on model legislation to help reclaim the millions of family members, friends, neighbors and coworkers in New Jersey and across the country who are stricken by the disease of drug addiction.

Three new expungement reform bills developed by Governor Christie and Senator Sandra Cunningham (D-Hudson) as part of their continuing bipartisan endeavor would prohibit employment discrimination based upon an expunged criminal record; accelerate expungements and increase the number of convictions that can be expunged; and reduce the waiting period to expunge an entire juvenile record.

"I commend Senator Cunningham for working with me on this legislation that will return many more recovering addicts to their families, as productive members of society and help break the costly cycle of recidivism," Governor Christie said. "It prevents a childhood or adolescent mistake from ruining someone's future, while still ensuring there are appropriate consequences for unlawful behavior and lessons are learned. These reforms represent a second chance at life for our family members, friends, neighbors and coworkers, and they provide the same opportunities we would desperately want for ourselves."

"A minor criminal offense should not lead to a lifetime of punishment. These bills are about removing barriers for residents and helping them to overcome the obstacles that exist to finding employment, taking care of their families and setting their lives on the right path," said Senator Cunningham. "I want to thank the Governor for being a partner in this important work. These bills are a great step to providing offenders with the second chance they deserve."

Senate bill 3306 would strengthen New Jersey's Opportunity to Compete Act, also known as "Ban the Box," sponsored by Senator Cunningham and signed into law by Governor Christie in August 2014. S-3306 would prevent those with current and expunged criminal records from being discriminated against at the early stages of employment pursuits.

Senate bill 3307 would reform procedures for expunging criminal records by:

Allowing a petitioner to expunge up to four, instead of three, offenses or multiple offenses that occurred within a short timeframe, if the petitioner has not been convicted of any prior or subsequent offense;

Reducing the expungement eligibility waiting period from 10 years to six years, following the latest of any conviction, payment of fine and completion of probation, parole or prison sentence;

Further reducing the expungement eligibility waiting period if satisfaction of a fine or restitution is the petitioner's only remaining barrier and the court finds that the expungement is in the public's interest; and

Aligning expungement and sentencing statutes, allowing expungement for possession of marijuana with the intent to sell up to one ounce, which is the threshold for a fourth-degree crime.

Senate bill 3308 would decrease from five to three years the waiting period to expunge an entire juvenile record, maintaining all other requirements and provisions.

“These necessary, life-saving reforms for people who deserve a second chance should be immediately passed by the New Jersey legislature and replicated across the country, as I have heard loud and clear from the victims of this disease and their families, grassroots leaders, medical professionals, law enforcement officers and those in the criminal justice system, during my travels around this great state and nation,” Governor Christie said.

Visit ReachNJ.gov for assistance with addiction prevention, treatment and recovery, as well as a record of Governor Christie’s initiatives, programs, policies and services at the forefront of America’s fight against this deadly disease.

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