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NEWS RELEASE

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East Metro prosecutors launch helpsealmyrecord.org

*Proactive effort furthers prosecutors' role as ministers of justice
by helping rehabilitated residents seal criminal records*

Saint Paul – Ramsey County Attorney John Choi and Washington County Attorney Pete Orput today announced a transformative effort to help people move beyond the barriers and collateral consequences associated with past justice system involvement. As of today, after completing their sentence and any applicable waiting period, rehabilitated people with a criminal record in Ramsey or Washington counties will be able to go to www.helpsealmyrecord.org to apply to seal their criminal record and alleviate the [collateral consequences](#) following a criminal conviction that can last a lifetime.

“Prosecutors are ministers of justice – it is our legal and ethical responsibility to help people who have paid their debt to society to remove the scarlet letter of a criminal conviction, along with the barriers it creates to accessing jobs, housing, education and other necessities in life,” said Ramsey County Attorney John Choi. “By proactively helping people who have done everything we have asked of them in the criminal justice system to seal their criminal records, we are transforming our approach to ensure our residents have access to justice, increasing their likelihood of success.”

According to the FBI, nearly one in three adults in America has a criminal record. Long after people have atoned for the harm they caused and fulfilled their obligations to the justice system, criminal records and the collateral consequences that follow serve as barriers to jobs, housing, education and more, preventing people from serving as productive members of our community.

Studies have shown very few people who are eligible to seal their records successfully apply, but among those whose records are sealed, very few commit new crimes and, on average, they experience a significant increase in wages and employment within the next two years – a win for them, for our economy and for our community.

“The expungement process is confusing, cumbersome and expensive – by helping people determine if they qualify and appealing to the court to seal the records of those who do, we are removing these burdens for our residents,” said Washington County Attorney Pete Orput. “As prosecutors, we must recognize that restoring people to productive members of our community when they do well is equally important as administering consequences when they commit crimes.”

Expungement – the legal process of sealing a criminal record – has been available in Minnesota to those with qualifying records since 1996. Changes to the law in 2014 & 2015 incorporated language directing courts to seal records if prosecutors agree, absent the interest of public safety requiring them to remain public. The law changes also expanded the number of eligible offenses. Typically, only those who could afford a private lawyer would even attempt to get their record sealed given the complexity of the process and associated court fees. In the last year alone in Ramsey County, 187 people applied for an expungement, with 120 of those using a lawyer to process it. In 2017 in Minnesota, 18,288 people were sentenced with a felony.

“We rightfully ask people who have done wrong to others and to society to pay the price. Too often, though, once they’ve paid that price and done everything we as a society have asked, they continue to pay the price -- sometimes for the rest of their lives. That makes it unfairly hard for them to afford their lives and live with dignity and respect, and that holds our whole society back,” said Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison. “The Ramsey and Washington County Attorneys’ Offices are taking a transformative step to make it part of their jobs as prosecutors to help seal the records of low-levels offenders who’ve paid the price and just want to give back. My office is proud to strongly support them and to partner with Ramsey County this weekend in a public fair to help people learn how to get this done.”

Although Minnesota state statute [609A.02](#) includes a long list of eligible offenses, some of the most common are: fifth degree drug possession or sale, theft, receiving stolen property, damage to property, forgery crimes, issuing a dishonored check, financial transaction card fraud, and mail theft.

To learn more about the expungement process or start an application, please see:

www.helpsealmyrecord.org

Twin Cities Informational Expungement Fair (closed to the press)

Date: Saturday, October 5, 2019
Time: 11:00am-1:00pm
Location: High School for Recording Arts
1166 University Avenue W.
Saint Paul, MN 55104

www.ag.state.mn.us/Office/Events/ExpungementFair.asp

Note: Ramsey County Attorney John Choi and Washington County Attorney Pete Orput are both available for comment. Please call Dennis Gerhardstein if you would like to arrange for an interview.