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Press Conference  
Prosecutor's Role in Sealing Criminal Records  
October 3, 2019  
12:00 Noon  
RCAO Library

Good Afternoon.

It was Martin Luther King, Jr. who once said “[t]he arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”

Justice is the most important, most central ideal all prosecutors should strive to achieve.

Today, I am pleased to announce a transformative shift in how prosecutors in Ramsey and Washington Counties conduct our work to ensure justice and public safety.

One of the most fundamental aspects to achieving justice is that punishment, at some point, must end.

Our practices in the justice system need to account for reconciliation, rehabilitation, and **redemption**.

The problem today is that too many people who have been convicted of misdemeanors and lower-level felonies can't ever

move on from their convictions - *even when they have done everything we have asked them to do* - because their criminal records brand them with a scarlet letter indefinitely.

This is true because of the widespread availability of criminal records, which we must recognize only reflect one aspect of a person's life.

Having a criminal record has been used as a litmus test to deny people opportunities for good-paying jobs, safe housing, education to better their lives and those of their families, and much, much, more.

It's time that we – as prosecutors charged with administering justice in our communities – *remove* that scarlet letter when people have earned it.

And that is why the expungement statute exists.

If the prosecutor agrees, the law directs courts to seal the criminal records of eligible people unless the judge determines there is a public safety reason not to do so.

But it will only happen if prosecutors make it a priority.

I want to be very clear.

We recognize that public safety requires our community to know about people who have committed serious and violent crimes such as murder, sex offenses, physical or sexual assault, or repeated criminal conduct.

That is why the legislature designed the law so none of those offenses are eligible.

Some of the most common eligible offenses are:

- low-level drug possession or sale,
- theft,
- receiving stolen property,
- property damage,
- forgery, and
- check or credit card fraud.

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When people have paid the price for their misdeeds and atoned for the harm they have caused, who are we as human beings if we do not put into practice deeply-held moral values around redemption and forgiveness?

I have heard the clarion call for mercy.

For people who have been rehabilitated, justice requires that there must be an end to punishment.

Today, we are pleased to announce a transformative effort for our offices to proactively help rehabilitated people seal their criminal records through a new website called:

[helpsealmyrecord.org](http://helpsealmyrecord.org).

Starting today, people with a criminal record in Ramsey or Washington counties will be able to apply online to our offices to seal their record and alleviate the [collateral consequences](#) that can last a lifetime.

By doing so, the applicant will not have to hire a lawyer or pay the \$300 *per petition* filing fee.

In addition to the cost barriers, we have learned many people who are eligible to have their records sealed don't even know it.

That's why our offices will continue to proactively reach out to eligible people like we did this past summer working with Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services. (SMRLS, which is our legal aid organization in the East Metro)

I want to thank them for their partnership in helping us find eligible people to test out this effort over the summer and the work they continue to do in referring people to our office.

I am also confident that our greater community - through our County Board, community foundations, law schools and non-profit agencies - cares deeply about this work and will join with us to collectively expand our reach to help raise awareness among people who may be eligible and connect them to this opportunity.

One of those partners is Workforce Solutions, who has already raised their hand to work with us to help connect the people they serve with criminal records to see if we can help.

I am excited just thinking about the positive difference that these types of partnerships can make in the lives of people in our community.

With all hands-on deck and everyone in our community pulling in the same direction, we can make a real difference.

As we continue to expand our efforts as prosecutors to enhance justice, together with our community, we will transform our justice system into one that administers compassionate accountability, rewards rehabilitation, and allows for redemption.

I want to thank my dedicated staff who have worked on operationalizing this new vision for prosecution.

Also, the County Manager and Board of Commissioners who first approved my budget request in Spring of 2018.

And, of course our partners in SMRLS, Attorney General Keith Ellison, and Washington County Attorney Peter Orput and his staff.