



March 9, 2022

Members of the House Public Safety and Criminal Justice Reform Finance and Policy Committee  
*Via Electronic Delivery*

**Re: Letter in Support of the Clean Slate Act, H.F. 1152**

Dear Members of the Committee:

Violence Free Minnesota (VFMN) and the Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MNCASA) submit this letter to express our support for the Clean Slate Act - HF1151/SF1315. We are statewide coalitions who, together, consist of over 120 member programs working to end domestic and sexual violence. Member programs provide direct services and support to survivors of domestic and sexual violence in all 87 counties in Minnesota.

We have often spoken about victims and offenders as two separate and distinct populations. We know that dichotomy is false. We know that victim/survivors far too often end up as defendants themselves in the criminal justice system. Research shows that as many as **94%** of incarcerated women have experienced domestic and sexual violence prior to incarceration.

For some incarcerated survivors, early victimization can be a catalyst for behaviors that entangle them in the criminal justice system as young people. For others, the crimes committed are directly linked to an abusive relationship, coercion, and threats of violence. Victims can be caught up in the criminal justice system with charges of their own for fighting back or acting in self-defense, for keeping their children from an abuser, or for being coerced into criminal activity. In other circumstances, survivors may turn to drugs or alcohol to cope with the effects of trauma and subsequently commit crimes connected to their substance abuse.

Survivors consistently cite criminal background checks as one of the most common and serious barriers to accessing housing. In a recent survey that Violence Free Minnesota conducted with survivors, **50%** of respondents listed criminal history as being one of the most challenging parts of the tenant screening process. VFMN recently conducted a survey with member programs about the housing challenges that impact the survivors who they work with. When asked to which aspects of the tenant screening process create the most barriers for survivors, **63%** of respondents included criminal history.

A criminal record raises significant barriers to employment, housing, and various other opportunities that are critical to stability and safety for survivors and their families. These obstacles can overwhelm a survivor's efforts at achieving safety, and can exacerbate poverty, inequality, and racial disparities in our state. Expungement protections, such as those laid out in the Clean Slate Act, can help alleviate the barriers to housing and employment that survivors face, and create increased safety and stability for survivors and their children.

Victim/survivor safety can be enhanced through good criminal legal system reforms, including the Clean Slate Act, and an investment in robust, culturally-responsive and community-based programming and services for both victims and offenders. Passing the Clean Slate Act is an important step in eliminating barriers and collateral

consequences of a criminal record and will help to increase safety and stability for survivors and their families in Minnesota.

Sincerely,

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