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**FOR RELEASE AT WILL**

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**LEGAL SERVICES SEES WAVE OF NEW APPLICATIONS FOR EXPUNGING  
CRIMINAL RECORDS AS NEW REFORM LAW TAKES EFFECT MONDAY**

EDISON — Likely thousands of New Jerseyans seeking to expunge their past criminal or juvenile records are expected to begin taking advantage of a new law that takes effect Monday (Oct. 1) to clean their records, according to Akil Roper of Legal Services of New Jersey (LSNJ).

The law — some characterize it as a “second chance” opportunity for individuals to reframe their lives — makes it a lot easier and faster for adults and juveniles to obtain expungements, and a wave of applications is expected, says Roper, a Vice President and Chief Counsel for Reentry at LSNJ, one of the organizations that supported the changes.

“Given the fact that the court currently processes some 10,000 expungement applications a year, I think it’s safe to say that the new changes will open the door for thousands more applications each year,” he asserted. “It is desperately important for the public to be made aware of the new reforms because the lives of so many people can be affected for the better who have served their time and paid their debt to society now will have a better chance to get a decent – paying job, secure housing and have other opportunities most of us take for granted.”

In that regard LSNJ has launched a major revision to its interactive website, “Clearing Your Record Online,” which can guide and speed people for free through the expungement application process, even by using their mobile phone. LSNJ also has produced its first-ever podcast that that will feature one of the prime sponsors of the expungement reform, State Sen.

Sandra B. Cunningham, D-Hudson, laying out why she believes the changes give so many more people the “opportunity to change their lives and make a difference.”

“A key change decreases the required waiting period from 10 years to six before a criminal record can be expunged”, Roper explained. “It also increases the number and types of offenses that can be erased, essentially allowing expungement of a set of crimes or offenses that occurred at roughly the same time or circumstances, known as a crime spree. Until now, expungement only was available to those who had no more than one criminal conviction in addition to two lesser offenses. Now individuals may expunge four convictions or more — if all are part of a crime spree and provided the expungement applicants have been clean of any other offenses for five years or six years in some situations.”

The waiting period for young adults to expunge their juvenile records was also recently reduced from five years to three.

“Many people,” notes LSNJ’s Roper, “have something on their record — not only convictions but even a dismissed case or juvenile matter. The bottom line is that record can haunt you forever. Expungement provides the avenue for a second chance.”

He says he personally has seen the elation and relief of clients helped by Legal Services in obtaining expungements.

Jamie, who recently was helped by LSNJ to expunge her criminal records, shared what it is like to get the burden off her back.

“It gave me a sense of closure from that part of my life that is no longer part of who I am today. And I believe that this is going to change not only my life, but my children’s lives and enable me to be successful and financially independent, and not have to rely on getting help from the system because I can stand on my own two feet.”

The “Clearing Your Record Online” site will include details about the latest expungement changes once the law is officially implemented Monday (Oct. 1). Launched in 2015, the site has since aided many through the expungement application process and provided them all sorts of related information. It is expected that the latest innovation — making access to the popular site available for the first time with mobile phones — will spur even more inquiries.

*Legal Services of New Jersey (LSNJ), located in Edison, heads the state’s Legal Services system, a network of five independent non-profit corporations and has been providing free essential legal aid in civil matters to low-income people through offices in all 21 counties for more than 50 years. Since its inception, New Jersey Legal Services has provided representation in more than 2.4 million cases.*