



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

**DC JUSTICE LAB AND LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS AND
RESIDENTS CALL ON DC COUNCIL TO PASS MEANINGFUL
RECORD-SEALING REFORM**

More than a hundred community residents have signed the letter.

WASHINGTON, DC, October 29, 2020 – Today DC Justice Lab joined by a coalition of DC-based community organizations sent an open letter to the DC Council urging the council to “seal the deal” by passing a criminal record sealing and expungement bill by November 13. The bill, which is set to expire by the end of 2020, would reduce barriers to housing and employment opportunities that significantly obstruct DC residents who have had contact with the criminal legal system.

“D.C.’s current record sealing law is so limited and unnecessarily complicated that many people need a trained attorney and an investigator just to get a decades-old misdemeanor non-conviction eliminated from their record,” said Patrice Sulton, Director and founder of DC Justice Lab. That’s why at DC Justice Lab, we are working to expand and simplify the District’s record sealing laws.”

In an open letter spearheaded by DC Justice Lab, more than a hundred DC residents and two dozen community-based organizations are demanding that D.C. Council provides D.C. residents meaningful opportunities to have their records sealed or expunged. Comprehensive record sealing and expungement is critical to allow true reentry into society for returning residents. People with prior contact with the criminal legal system, even for minor offenses, are actively shut out from housing and employment opportunities and are expected to face unprecedented new realities as communities cope with the present and future economic fallout of the pandemic. The letter highlights that the impact of a criminal record is unfairly and disproportionately carried by Black residents, referencing statistics that show that the vast majority of people arrested in the District are Black, despite being roughly 45% of the population. Black residents also face disproportionate unemployment in the District.

The coalition notes that despite this critical need in the nation’s capital, prior bills for record sealing and expungement have continually been neglected by the Council the last three years. Currently, record sealing is available to an extremely limited number of people; the current system’s numerous hurdles and waiting periods cause individuals to wait several years to seal even minor arrests that did not result in conviction. Furthermore, employers often use publicly available criminal records of arrests and convictions to deny deserving individuals jobs.

“The way DC has handled criminal records over the years is yet another example of systems of inequity and injustice in our city,” said Doni Crawford, Policy Analyst at the DC Fiscal Policy Institute (DCFPI). “Because of blatant discrimination by landlords and employers against people who had prior contact with the criminal legal system, those who have paid their debt—some

who were never even convicted of crimes they were accused of—are forced to go without work and housing in a city with skyrocketing costs of living and child care. The Council has an opportunity—and can choose—to right these wrongs by delivering a marked-up criminal record sealing and expungement omnibus bill.”

The full letter is available at [Seal the Deal](#).

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ABOUT DC JUSTICE LAB

DC Justice Lab is a team of law and policy experts researching, organizing, and advocating for large-scale changes to the District’s criminal legal system. We develop strategies and solutions that are evidence-driven, community-rooted, and racially just.

We aim to fully transform the District’s approach to punishment and public safety. We promote decarceration, compassion, and giving people the tools and resources they need to thrive. We work with and transfer power to DC residents most impacted by criminal laws.

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