

"H. R. 1529 - The Second Chance for Ex-Offenders Act of 2009"

Dear [Representative],

I am writing on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of men and women who, having been convicted of a Federal Felony, and regardless of the sentence handed down by the courts and having "paid their debt to society", are also being handed a hidden life sentence that is not a part of any judicial proceeding.

H. R. 1529 - The Second Chance for Ex-Offenders Act of 2009 legislation was sponsored by Congressman Charles Rangel (D-NY) on March 16, 2009. Rep. Rangel has been trying - unsuccessfully since 2002 - to get this expungement of federal convictions bill passed. So, 2009 must be the year he meets with success.

A first time, non-violent offender who has paid their full debt deserves a second chance. They deserve an opportunity to earn their lives back. These people are not "hardened criminals." Rather they are quite ordinary people who have made a bad decision. They know it, they take full responsibility for their actions and they are full of remorse for the pain that they have caused to their families. Many too are so called "white collar" offenders who had very good jobs before they made a mistake. Even someone like Martha Stewart fits this category. However, unlike Ms. Stewart most of these people do not have a merchandising empire to fall back on. Most will never be able to regain their previous position. They are disenfranchised in too many ways to enumerate here.

Even US Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald has championed the need for more carrots as we have so many sticks. So many of these young men and women who have non-violent convictions for example – marijuana possession, are given probation sentences. They graduate with Master's degrees, or Law, or Science, or Education degrees, but they cannot even get a job working in a Walmart or volunteering to tutor children - all because of their felony conviction. If the House Judiciary Committee would vote – Yes, and pass H.R. 1529 to expunge their conviction, these well educated and qualified young people could make a difference in their communities. Instead the current system gives them the Stick - a permanent life sentence. They drift from one underemployment job to next, if they can find one, for the rest of their lives.

There is much rhetoric from many in the justice system and Congress, about how much is being done to rehabilitate those who have committed a crime, how much is being done to prepare them for their return to society. These are hollow, meaningless words when the reality is that we do everything possible to hamper previous offenders from regaining a productive place in society. Then we raise a hue and cry about how high the recidivism rate is.

The concept of "permanent punishment" with no hope of restoration for a non-violent first-time offender is void of any of the commonly held concepts of fairness. This bill is not a Democrat/Republican, Conservative/Liberal, or Black/Latino/White. Rather it is simply doing the right thing - the human and humane thing.

We have sent 2,260 letters to Congress so far. Please join us!

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