BY AMANDA POLESE THE SUBURBAN, FEB 16, 2022

Coalition of 85 groups urges Ottawa to speed up criminal record eliminations

OPINION

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The Fresh Start Coalition is currently lobbying for a bill to reform the way the federal government deals with criminal records. The coalition, which now includes 85 civil society groups across Canada, is asking Ottawa to implement a 'spent records' regime which would automatically seal a person's criminal record once they have successfully completed their sentence and have not committed another offence.

"Record suspensions should be automatic for those who have successfully completed their sentence and lived in the community for years," said Abby Deshman Criminal Justice Program Director with the Canadian Civil Liberties Association. The federal government promised to reform Canada's criminal record suspension regime in 2016 – the coalition argues that the proposed spent regime would promote proper reintegration, workforce participation and improve overall community safety.

"People don't realize how compromised a person with a criminal record is," said veteran defence lawyer Ralph Mastromonaco. "That person is stigmatized with being a criminal."

Currently, Canadians with a criminal record must wait a minimum 10 years after serving their sentence before obtaining a pardon, which does not erase their record but makes the information inaccessible from the public.

The coalition said that most large corporations won't hire someone based on the mere existence of a criminal record which makes it hard for a former convict to find employment and can contribute to re-offences. Those with a criminal record face issues doing volunteer work and finding housing as well.

The reform bill, initiated by the Senate, still requires approval from the House of Commons.

It calls for the removal of a criminal record two years after the end of a sentence for minor offences and five years for more serious offences.

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