

## **Commentary**

### **Clean Slate provides opportunities and grows our economy**

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Many challenges in business and life can be self-imposed. This is particularly true when it comes to workforce shortages. The self-sabotaging approach of excluding individuals with certain criminal records for employment mirrors and helps to perpetuate the cycle that increases an individual's propensity towards crime in the first place.

Certain nonviolent and nonsexual criminal backgrounds often are not predicated on immutable factors. Typically, they are simply due to a lack of meaningful income, a sense of duty, or an absence of resources to better one's circumstances. We have found that when provided the chance, people will lean into opportunity and make decisions far better for themselves and others. It's time to create a new cycle where previously closed doors can be opened for individuals to improve their lives. Not only will this fortify the communities we live in, but simultaneously address the workforce shortages many businesses claim to suffer from.

The New York State Clean Slate Act is an overdue initiative that significantly benefits both individuals and businesses. This legislation is designed to help people with certain criminal records overcome the obstacles they face when seeking employment, housing and other opportunities.

Under Clean Slate NY, eligible individuals who have been convicted of certain nonviolent and nonsexual offenses will have their records automatically sealed after a specified period. More people will be able to pursue education, employment and other opportunities without the stigma and barriers associated with a criminal record.

Studies have shown that people with criminal records currently face significant barriers to employment and often end up in lower-paying jobs, unstable work environments, or unemployed altogether. Aside from detrimental impacts and a detachment to an individual's self-worth and community, this leads to a loss of potential talent and skills in the workforce, as well as a decrease in tax revenue. Studies have also shown that people with criminal records can be highly motivated and productive employees when given the opportunity and surrounded by others with similar goals. It's said that you are the average of the five people you spend the most time with.

By providing individuals with a path to record sealing, we can help break down barriers associated with a criminal record and gain access to a wider pool of talent, promote economic growth, reduce recidivism and most importantly strengthen our communities.

In addition to my support of the Clean Slate Act, I intend to continue providing opportunities for and hiring individuals from disadvantaged communities. We have had great success with this train of thought and I encourage other organizations to take the same stance. We encourage individuals on their re-entry journey to reach out and consider joining one of our teams.

Greg Shoemaker is president of ARCA in Amherst.