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Rehabilitation through Pardons

individuals with historical criminal records. They need to understand the suspension process to better assist community members.

The suspension process is not a core policing function. However, as the holders of the criminal records, police are a key touch point within the application process. The public expects police to be a primary resource for assistance when dealing with criminal matters. In many cases, those with a police record are not accustomed to dealing with paperwork and bureaucracy. The time spent with each individual puts an additional burden on staff.

While police recognize the value of pardon applications, they are not able to provide legal advice to individuals about applying to the Parole Board or leading them through the process, which can be complex and involve a great deal of documentation.

With the introduction of the "Record Suspension" system in 2012, the application process became more difficult with higher fees and longer wait times. The Canadian Press reported a 40 per cent drop in applications and even fewer being accepted by the Parole Board.

Proposed Changes

In January 2016, federal Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale stated that the government was considering "re-examining" the changes to make the system more forgiving of past mistakes.

Pardon Services Canada supports changes to pardon applications. Our justice system is based on rehabilitation and criminal pardons are a

fundamental component to any crime reduction strategy. When citizens feel empowered through good jobs, community standing, and the pride of being able to support themselves and their families, they are at low risk to reoffend.

As frontline workers who are increasingly being mandated to be proactive in terms of crime prevention, police officers should be able to direct individuals who have made positive changes in their lives to a pardon system that is fair and accessible.

Established in 1989, Pardon Services Canada has not only helped thousands of Canadians move forward with their lives through pardon applications, but we are also a leading advocate for people with criminal records who could benefit from the opportunities that a sealed record provides. We are excited to be building relationships with police services to help them assist past offenders who are now living law-abiding lives. We have become B2B (Business to Business) partners with the OACP and entered into a partnership with the Orangeville Police Service to enhance the record suspension process.

Our goal is building mutual relationships that help reduce the burden on frontline staff while at the same time fulfilling the role to proactively work with individuals to reduce recidivism and build safe communities. We look forward to increased partnerships, especially as society and government continues to appreciate the important role pardons play in the criminal rehabilitation process.

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Society and policing are changing at a rapid pace. In an opening address to the Association of Municipalities Ontario in 2015, Community Safety and Correctional Services Minister Yasir Naqvi stated that, "Now is the time to set the course for an effective, sustainable and community focused model of policing for the 21st century." The Minister's comment sets the tone for the hard work the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police (OACP) and the Ministry have engaged in as they explore a new model for the future of policing.

One issue of particular concern is the demand for criminal record checks, which has had a negative impact on our communities, particularly on the more than four million or 12 per cent of Canadians who have criminal convictions. Record Suspensions are the tool to remove this burden from past offenders who have demonstrated a proven lifestyle of rehabilitation.

Police officers understand that offenders often return to their communities, and a criminal record can act as a barrier to employment, volunteering, and crossing international borders. This directly influences their ability to adopt a crime-free lifestyle. Offender management units along with frontline officers are often approached for advice regarding