

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/ohio-takes-step-to-roll-back-collateral-consequences>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Millions of people each year complete their sentences. With so many affected, the consequences of a criminal sentence can be far reaching and long lasting. Indeed, it is often collateral consequences—civil sanctions that are triggered by a criminal conviction but are not part of the sentence imposed by the judge—that prove most damaging for people with criminal records and their families. Common collateral consequences include: loss or denial of professional/vocational license and other barriers to employment, loss of voting rights, and ineligibility for food stamps and public housing.

Collateral sanctions often make the transition from prison to life in the community even more difficult by denying people the very social benefits they need to reenter society successfully. While some of these laws are the result of legitimate public safety concerns, states serious about breaking the cycle of recidivism will need to find a balance between policies aimed at protecting public safety and those intended to facilitate successful reentry by people who have completed their sentences.

Ohio is one state that is trying to strike this balance. [Senate Bill 227](#), which next month becomes law, builds upon system-wide criminal justice reform ([House Bill 86](#)) undertaken by the state's lawmakers in 2011 and brings new energy to efforts to ensure better outcomes for ex-offenders, their families and communities.

Among its most significant provisions, SB 227 removes licensing prohibitions for certain occupations, authorizes individuals with convictions to apply for certificates of qualifications for employment, provides immunity for employers from negligent hiring lawsuits, expands opportunities for sealing of adult and juvenile criminal records, and provides discretionary, instead of mandatory, suspension of drivers licenses in many situations. In short, the legislation makes it easier for those with criminal convictions to find jobs and generally move forward with their lives.

Ohio's willingness to take on one of the more challenging issues states face when attempting to lower recidivism rates is more than noteworthy. By reducing collateral consequences, the state is taking an important next step to fulfilling the larger promise of recent criminal justice reform to create safer and more prosperous communities.

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