



July 24, 2023

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Speaker of the House
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Steve Scalise
House Majority Leader
2049 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: CPAC & FFC Support for Begin Again Act

Dear Speaker McCarthy and Majority Leader Scalise

The Conservative Political Action Coalition (“CPAC”) is the nation’s oldest grassroots advocacy organization. Founded over 50 years ago by William F. Buckley as the American Conservative Union, CPAC has a track record of advancing policies that reduce the size of government, protect liberty, and reduce burdens on families. Given these shared goals, our work regularly includes furthering efforts that reduce recidivism and make communities safer. Through its 25 state affiliates and 2.5 million members nationwide, the Faith and Freedom Coalition promotes public policy that strengthens families, promotes time-honored values, and provides for a just society because we believe the greatness of America lies in the character of her people—the virtues of faith, marriage, family, hard work, personal responsibility, and helping the least among us. The Coalition is committed to educating, equipping, and mobilizing people of faith and like-minded individuals to be effective and active citizens and voters. In pursuing this shared mission, our organizations write in support of Kenneth P. Thompson Begin Again Act.

All too often in our justice system, punishments extend far beyond the original sentence. A criminal record functions no differently than a “scarlett letter,” as some of the greatest drivers of recidivism are the barriers former-offenders face when trying to reenter society. Those affected are in constant turmoil as they struggle to stabilize their lives, losing familial connections while struggling to obtain meaningful employment or lasting housing. These consequences can lead formerly incarcerated individuals back into a life of crime out of desperation, creating new victims and perpetuating a cycle that harms public safety.

Thankfully, the Begin Again Act seeks to break this cycle, therefore improving public safety. Currently, there is an age limitation for those seeking an expungement order for a first-time federal drug possession offense. Should an individual happen to be 21 years of age or older at the time of the offense, they are barred from seeking any such order. The Begin Again Act will eliminate this

arbitrary age limitation and allow *any* eligible offender to seek expungement following their completion of prejudgment probation.

We know that a criminal record prevents individuals from obtaining meaningful employment, as employers are hesitant to give them a chance. Consequently, returning citizens struggle economically, often resulting in their return to crime in a desperate attempt to make ends meet. Without a consistent income, individuals cannot support themselves, their family, or pursue their life goals.¹ By allowing first-time federal drug possession offenders of all ages to seek expungement, we allow them to retain the opportunity to obtain meaningful employment and reenter society.

Studies have also shown that residential instability has a strong correlation to increased recidivism rates, yet another collateral consequence.² Landlords often deny applicants with a criminal record, and even when they obtain housing, their lack of consistent income makes it difficult to pay rent. Without access to one's own residence, it is incredibly difficult to reenter society and move forward in life.

A family cannot stay together when they are struggling to find employment and housing. Consequently, these families break apart and lose each other's support at a time when they need it most. This has a particularly negative impact on the children, as they are far more likely to develop behavioral or physical health conditions under such circumstances.³ Allowing a parent the opportunity to seek expungement, after just one low-level mistake, will ensure the stability of all affected families and further help reduce recidivism rates.

The Begin Again Act provides the opportunity for deserving individuals to reenter society and prevent unnecessary barriers being placed on their futures. By eliminating the current and arbitrary age limitation, this Act provides a second chance to returning citizens. As a result, recidivism drops, meaning there are less victims of new crimes, less resources that law enforcement must extend, and new advocates for rehabilitation – all of which improve public safety. We urge you to join us in supporting the Begin Again Act as the legislation will ensure there are less criminals on the streets, more families that stay connected, and a stronger workforce throughout communities across the country.

Should you have any questions regarding this matter, please feel free to contact our organizations at: dsafavian@conservative.org and tim@ffcoalition.com.

Respectfully,



David H. Safavian
General Counsel
CPAC



Timothy R. Head
Executive Director
FFC

¹Lucius Couloute & Daniel Kopf, *Out of Prison & Out of Work: Unemployment among formerly incarcerated people*, Prison Policy Initiative, July 2018, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/outofwork.html>.

² Leah A. Jacobs & Aaron Gottlieb, *The Effect of Housing Circumstances on Recidivism*, Criminal Justice and Behavior, August 2020, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8496894/>.

³ Paola Scommegna, *Parents' Imprisonment Linked to Children's Health, Behavioral Problems*, Population Reference Bureau, December 2014, <https://www.prb.org/resources/parents-imprisonment-linked-to-childrens-health-behavioral-problems/>.