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JOHN HOWARD SOCIETY OF ONTARIO WELCOMES NEW PROVINCIAL POLICE RECORD CHECK LEGISLATION

TORONTO - For over a decade, the John Howard Society of Ontario (JHSO) has been raising concerns about the disclosure of non-conviction information on police record checks.

Routinely, through police record checks, police have disclosed information about non-criminal and non-conviction interactions with Ontarians. Though most don't realize it, simply calling 9-1-1 for help during a mental health crisis can trigger a police report. So too can being stopped and questioned about a robbery in your neighbourhood. Revealing these non-criminal interactions through requested police record checks has had devastating consequences.

"The disclosure of non-conviction information is not an innocent practice. It strikes at the heart of our cherished legal presumption of innocence. It has also destroyed the hopes of countless people for jobs, housing, volunteering and education" states Jacqueline Tasca, Policy Analyst at the Centre of Research, Policy & Program Development at JHSO. "We have researched and documented the harm this practice has inflicted on Ontarians, many of whom are vulnerable and voiceless. As a result, we called for legislation."

The introduction of legislation to regulate police record checks and the disclosure of non-conviction information in Ontario is welcome: "Today's legislation is so important. Thousands of Ontarians have non-conviction records and don't even know it. Nor would they until it is far too late. We applaud and wholeheartedly support the government's initiative" says Tasca. "Though today is but the first step in the legislative process, it signals a tremendous step forward for all Ontarians, who have or could face discrimination, stigmatization and exclusion arising from the release of non-conviction records."

The legislation tabled by the provincial government today is the culmination of years of research, collaboration, advocacy and leadership among policing, community-based and governmental parties. In particular, JHSO acknowledges the leadership and vision of the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police who collaboratively developed the best practice Guideline upon which the legislation is based.

In JHSO's recently released report entitled, [Help Wanted*: Reducing Barriers for Ontario's Youth with Police Records](#), the hiring practices of a sample of Ontario employers were examined. Among our findings:

- 51% of the organizations surveyed require police background checks of prospective employees.
- 15% of employers who require record checks reported that they will not hire anyone with a police record regardless of the nature of record, how much time has passed since it was acquired, or its relevance to the job position.

As the demand for police record checks escalates across sectors, a growing number of Ontarians with non-conviction police records face undue exclusion and discrimination. There is no evidence to suggest a link between past non-conviction records and future (criminal) behaviour. What does demonstrably improve community safety is employment and positive community engagement. Excluding a huge proportion of Ontarians from pro-social engagement is, therefore, counterproductive to building healthy and safe communities.

To read John Howard Society of Ontario's past research and reports on police record checks, please visit www.johnhoward.on.ca

The Centre of Research, Policy & Program Development at the John Howard Society of Ontario engages in non-partisan research, policy analysis, public education and program evaluation in the social and criminal justice sector.

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