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Gov. Ned Lamont signs ‘clean slate’ bill erasing criminal records of more than 300,000 Connecticut residents into law but expresses concern that more categories of serious crime were not excluded

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Gov. Ned Lamont on Thursday signed a bill that would erase the criminal records of more than 300,000 Connecticut residents for misdemeanors and some felonies.

But in an unusual step, the Democratic governor sent a letter to lawmakers expressing concern that too many serious crimes qualify for removal under the law.

“Although certain categories of crimes such as sexually violent offenses or crimes designated as family violence crimes are not subject to erasure under this legislation, I continue to have concerns that more felonies were not excluded,” Lamont said in a letter to lawmakers that was released by his office in tandem with the announcement that he had signed the legislation.

“I also am concerned that the erased records will not be available to criminal justice agencies to consider in determining whether to issue a gun permit or to the Judicial Branch in the event the individual is someday back in court. I call on the legislature to address these concerns,” Lamont wrote.

The “clean slate” legislation cleared the General Assembly late last month. Advocates say the measure is important because a criminal record can hamper a person’s ability to get credit, obtain a job or secure housing.

“All people, including people who are living with a criminal record, should have an equal opportunity to build successful and fulfilling lives,” said Gus Marks-Hamilton, a campaign manager for the ACLU of Connecticut’s Smart Justice campaign. “When a person has done their time and paid their debt to society they should be granted the right to fully participate in and contribute to society.”

Under the bill, criminal records would be erased, starting in 2023.

Convictions for misdemeanors would be erased if the person was not convicted of another crime in the previous seven years, while some lower-level felonies would be erased 10 years after the most recent conviction. The person will not have to apply for a pardon or appear before the Board of Pardons and Paroles.

Crimes that will not be erased include burglary with a firearm, stalking, voyeurism, sex-related crimes involving minors and assault on the blind, elderly or pregnant women, among others.

Supporters of the measure say it will allow people to become productive members of society after they have paid for their crime. But critics say there

are already many programs to help first-time offenders avoid the burden of a criminal record.

The bill initially included more categories of crime eligible for erasure. Proponents said the final version of the legislation was watered down, and they would have preferred an earlier version that included the automatic erasure of Class C felonies.

That version, written by Democrats in the legislature, would have erased a wider variety of serious crimes. But Republicans and Lamont both objected. While Lamont, in his message to lawmakers, expressed hope that they would address his concerns in the future, the ACLU said it will be pressing for an expansion of the law.

“While we are so proud of the years of work that went into making this bill a reality, we are also expecting the legislature to ensure that the people that were carved out of this opportunity for relief are included in future legislation,” Marks-Hamilton said.

The Clean Slate proposal is one of three criminal justice initiatives approved this session but the other two bills — one ensuring incarcerated people have access to free phone calls and the other placing strict limits on the use of solitary confinement — have yet to be reviewed by the governor’s legal team.