



Gov. Signs ‘Clean Slate’ Bill

by Hugh McQuaid

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UPDATED 2:00 pm — Gov. Ned Lamont said Thursday he would sign a “clean slate” bill approved late last month by the legislature which would automatically expunge records of certain criminal convictions.

“I’m certainly going to sign ‘Clean Slate’ as soon as I’m done with this press briefing,” Lamont told reporters during an afternoon press conference, putting to rest two weeks of speculation.

The proposal, which the House sent to Lamont’s desk on May 27, was intended to help formerly-incarcerated people move on with their lives and find employment by automatically clearing records of their past convictions after between seven and 10 years, depending on the severity of the crime. It covers misdemeanors and some class D and E felonies.

Lamont, who has backed similar proposals, had previously expressed concerns about legislation expunging felony

convictions. For more than a week he has told reporters he was still reviewing the bill and declined to say whether he would sign it.

When the governor signed the bill later on Thursday, he sent a letter to lawmakers asking for some future changes to the law. Although lawmakers made late alterations to the bill excluding additional crimes from expungement, Lamont asked them to eliminate more felonies from eligibility. He also had concerns about judicial and law enforcement access to erased records.

“I continue to have concerns that more felonies were not excluded. 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,” Lamont wrote. “I call on the legislature to address these concerns.”

On Wednesday as the legislative session wrapped up, the governor seemed willing to sign the bill into law. He said he expected to announce a decision Thursday.

“My instinct is I’m going to sign it. I gotta look at the final draft, I’ve got to see what the category of class D felonies they’ve added

on top of misdemeanors but the guys that I've been talking to say that it's a pretty responsible thing to do and we'll probably sign it," Lamont said.

Earlier Wednesday, Sen. Gary Winfield, a New Haven Democrat who is co-chair of the Judiciary Committee, said he had not heard anything from Lamont's office about the governor's intentions. Winfield said advocates for the bill had been reaching out to the Lamont administration urging his signature.

"This is a bill that has deep impacts on human beings and actually despite what some people would think, this policy actually makes us safer," Winfield said. "The whole argument about whether we have whole human beings or not, damaged human beings or not. That's a real thing. I hope the governor cares enough about public safety to sign the bills."

The bill is one of three high-profile criminal justice policies awaiting a decision from the governor. The legislature also passed another bill which limits the use of solitary confinement in Connecticut prisons. Another bill would make calls from inside correctional facilities free. The state previously had some of the highest rates for inmate calls in the country.

Last week, Lamont's budget director suggested the administration was leaning towards reducing the rates to make them competitive with other states rather than making them free. Although the governor has still not said whether he would sign the bill, on Tuesday he was leaning towards signing it.

"It was not right that we were charging a big surcharge to folks who were incarcerated so they could call their loved ones at home. I would have put it more towards the market rate but I understand there's strong bipartisan support to do it no cost. So I've got to take a look at that to make sure it fits within the budget," Lamont said.

Sen. Cathy Osten, co-chair of the Appropriations Committee, said the budget passed by the legislature Wednesday includes funding for free phone calls.