

# Lift the Burden to Lobby for Changes to Canadian Record Suspension Policy

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**VANCOUVER**— Four million Canadians have a criminal record, hindering their ability to find employment, travel, or even just coach their kids' soccer games. Lift the Burden, a new advocacy campaign launched by Pardon Services Canada, aims to help erase the stigma of a past criminal record and advocate for legislative amendments to make record suspensions (formerly called pardons) fair, affordable and accessible to all Canadians.

For nearly 30 years, Canadians with a past criminal record, who were deemed by the Parole Board of Canada to have demonstrated good conduct since the completion of their sentence, could apply for a record suspension for free. This allowed them to gain employment, volunteer and ultimately put their past behind them. While those benefits still exist today, recent amendments to the Criminal Records Act have made it significantly more difficult for ordinary Canadians to receive a record suspension. Eligibility wait times increased from three years to five years for summary offences, and doubled from five years to 10 years for indictable offences. At the same time, Parole Board application fees increased more than tenfold from \$50 to \$631 over a period of two years.

Skyrocketing fees and wait times stand as significant barriers for everyday Canadians to access record suspensions—a tool that has proven to be effective in making our communities safer and enabling past offenders to reintegrate into society. Since 1970, more than 400,000 Canadians have received record suspensions. Of those people, 96% have not re-offended, which confirms that this system works.

**Lift the Burden is advocating for two key policy amendments:**

- 1. We want the cost to apply for a record suspension at the Parole Board of Canada to be free.** For more than 40 years, record suspensions have proven to be a key tool in reducing crime, increasing employment and eliminating recidivism. We believe government should support the system as a societal benefit, as was the case from 1970 to 1997.
- 2. We want eligibility wait periods to be rolled back from five years to three years for summary offences and from ten years to five years for indictable offences.** Since its implementation in 2012, the unintended consequences of this amendment have become clear. A 19 year-old university student with a marijuana possession charge would be ineligible to apply for a record suspension for five years after the completion of her sentence. Her record will severely limit her opportunities to find employment after graduation and reach her full potential.

"1 in 8 Canadians has a criminal record—that's over 4 million people with typically minor offences whose opportunities to work, travel and volunteer are limited. We believe that a record suspension is the last—but crucial—step in a fair and smart justice system. That's why we're working to help lift the burden of these deserving Canadians by advocating for timely and affordable access to record suspensions."

— Azmairnin Jadavji, President and CEO, Pardon Services Canada

Lift the Burden gets in touch with Canadians through their website at [www.lifltheburden.ca](http://www.lifltheburden.ca), where engaging videos and infographics will help introduce the public to these issues.



and serves as a platform to build a broad coalition of supporters, stakeholders and advocates.

With the upcoming federal election scheduled for October 19th, Lift the Burden will be asking all declared candidates to pledge their support for our campaign and help Canadians realize that their past doesn't have to be limited by their future.

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