



PLSE PARTNERS WITH DREXEL IN DEVELOPMENT OF MOBILE APP THAT HAS “MAJOR IMPORTANCE FOR THE ECONOMIES OF CITIES”

APRIL 16, 2018. Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity (PLSE) announced today that it has been awarded a \$10,000 grant from the Thomas Skelton Harrison Foundation to develop a mobile-friendly web application for use in applying for pardons in Pennsylvania (Pardon Me™). [Drexel University’s Department of Criminology and Justice Studies](#) and the [Drexel ExCITe Center](#) will partner in the project.

“PLSE started working with Lieutenant Governor Stack and the Board of Pardons in 2016 to help make Pennsylvania’s ‘Pathways to Pardons’ program more accessible to those with criminal records,” said PLSE’s executive director Tobey Oxholm. “Our vision has been to make the process less overwhelming to those who have earned forgiveness for their past crimes, and this grant puts that hope within reach.”

Current data suggest that at least one in five Philadelphians, or 340,000 people, have been convicted of crimes more significant than summary offenses, and those convictions can be erased from the public record only by a pardon from the governor. Often occurring decades earlier, while the offender was significantly younger and at a very different point in his or her life, the criminal record lasts forever, making it very difficult if not impossible to get accepted into trade schools or assisted care facilities, obtain credit, or get jobs or promotions to which they would otherwise be well qualified. It was recently estimated that over 80% of landlords use the publicly-available criminal record histories when doing background checks. Because poorer neighborhoods, largely minority, suffer disproportionately as a result of the high rates of arrest their residents experience, convictions have severe and long-lasting economic consequences not only for families, but for whole neighborhoods.

“This is a truly exciting development for the people of our Commonwealth,” said Lieutenant Governor Mike Stack who, as chairman of the state Board of Pardons, he made it clear that people deserve a second chance in life. “Any offense in Pennsylvania is pardonable for people who have truly turned their lives around and become productive citizens. PLSE, Drexel, and the Trustees of the Thomas Skelton Harrison Foundation are to be commended for their vision, creativity and very practical approach to the issue of criminal record histories, which has major importance for the economic well-being of our cities.”

The Application for Clemency is daunting for the average Philadelphian, who has a fifth-grade education: fewer than 20% of the applications that are requested from the Board of Pardons are actually completed, and at least one-third of them get rejected for errors. PLSE’s goal is to develop a mobile-friendly web application, or “Pardons App,” that can be utilized by a wide variety of potential users on their mobile devices, independent of a specific platform, that will not just help but encourage the user to keep going, using the “level up” reward systems used in video games. Drexel University’s ExCITe Center – geared to creating “Expressive and Creative Interactive Technologies” – is perfectly positioned to lead this development, especially since Drexel already offers electronic portfolios for all of its students.

ABOUT PLSE: Founded in 2010, PLSE provides free legal representation to low income residents of Philadelphia whose criminal records are holding them back from achieving their potential as productive, contributing citizens. The services include seeking expungements in criminal court and pardons from the Governor, educating elected and community leaders, and empowering under-resourced communities to seek a greater voice and needed legislative reforms. PLSE was twice recognized in 2017 as an exemplary non-profit, with both a 2018-19 Barra Award, and the Pennsylvania Bar Foundation’s Goffman Award. For more information about PLSE, visit our website or contact info@plsephilly.org.

Recipient of the 2018-2019 Barra Award as an Exemplary Non-Profit
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