

Pardon Board Releases “Revolutionary” New Application, Sets New Standard For Clarity And Access

JUNE 11, 2019 – The Pennsylvania Board of Pardons today posted on its website a new and almost completely redesigned Application for Clemency that promises to make pardons far more accessible for the average citizen.

A year ago, the application was 20 pages long, included 3 government forms and 12 pages of instructions, and was written in difficult to understand, official terms. The new form is half as long, and written in words much more commonly used. It eliminates most of the ways mistakes were made in the past (no longer asking, for example, that applicants copy numbers appearing on attached documents). It also gives the applicant the choice of whether or not to include a personal statement, and makes it clear that an applicant does not have to include information about any criminal charges that a judge has expunged (erased) from the applicant’s record – a requirement that had received strong objections from the Philadelphia and Allegheny County Bar Associations, among others.

“Under the leadership of Lieutenant Governor John Fetterman and Secretary Brandon Flood, the Board of Pardons has, within just a few short months, put the possibility of a pardon within the reach of thousands of Pennsylvanians, especially those who are unable to afford an attorney,” said Rochelle M. Fedullo, Chancellor of the Philadelphia Bar Association. “This revolutionary new form was unanimously adopted by the Board of Pardons. That fact speaks volumes about the Board’s shared commitment to redefine what a pardon means – not just to individuals and their families, but to whole communities.”

The presidents of the Workforce Development Boards of both Pittsburgh and Philadelphia have recently confirmed that “criminal records are undeniably a major factor in keeping people and families in poverty.” Marcel Pratt, Philadelphia’s City Solicitor, has recognized the importance of pardons to entire communities that have been afflicted by persistent poverty: “For us, in Philadelphia,” he has said, “removing criminal records is not just the right thing to do for individuals, and not just the right thing to do for their families: it is a critical and essential neighborhood investment strategy. We have to get people working at their highest and best levels. And best of all, removing their stigma costs us nothing - it’s entirely free.”

“If people see a pardon as a viable option, they will continue to be productive citizens,” Secretary Flood has said. “My own story shows them there’s a light at the end of the tunnel. I thank Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity for its persistence in pushing us to re-examine our processes and to make the many reforms that are included in this new application. I am confident it will make all the difference to thousands of Pennsylvanians who have turned their lives around.”

ABOUT PLSE: 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, creating community-based Pardon Hubs, and empowering under-resourced communities to seek a greater voice and needed systemic reforms. PLSE is a recipient of the 2018-2019 Barra Award as an Exemplary Non-Profit Organization.