



Report on the First Year

July 2019

“Our society can invest every dollar we have in job training and workforce development, but we have no chance to succeed if these individuals are still prevented by the bad choices they made decades ago from getting the jobs or housing for which they are qualified today. People who have demonstrably turned their lives around deserve a second chance.”

~ Nikia Owens, Ph.D., Managing Director, Financial Empowerment

United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey, Aug. 27, 2018

“It is undeniable that criminal records are a major factor keeping individuals and their families in poverty.... Their records prevent them from getting jobs that are available and for which they are qualified. For some, these are professional jobs in accounting and health care; but even at the trades level, a criminal record stops them from enrolling in training programs or taking the examination that leads to a state license. We see these individuals facing career barriers each day, losing income and hope.”

~ Earl Buford, Chief Executive Officer, Partner4Work (Pittsburgh), Jan. 10, 2019

“It’s crushing that what someone was charged with 10 or 15 years ago, very often when they were young adults, can completely wipe out everything that person has done since then to improve themselves, even if they have accepted responsibility. We need to address unjust systems as we work to repair individual lives.”

~ Sarah Martinez-Helfman, President, Samuel S. Fels Fund, Oct. 22, 2018

“For us, in Philadelphia, 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.”

~ Marcel Pratt, Solicitor, City of Philadelphia, January 29, 2019

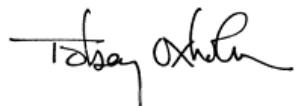
In September 2018, Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity (PLSE) launched its Pardon Project. Designed to supplement our Criminal Records Expungement Project, the immediate objective was (and remains) to help deserving low-income people who have been convicted of misdemeanors or felonies obtain a pardon from the Governor, which would then allow those convictions to be expunged (erased) from their criminal records. Our audacious four-year goal: the filing of 2000 pardon applications annually by low-income Philadelphians.

The challenge: the Board of Pardons (whose recommendation is required before the Governor can grant a pardon) has never heard more than 363 applications in any one year from the entire state while, by PLSE’s estimate, there could be as many as 100,000 low-income Philadelphians who have turned their lives around and could be eligible for a pardon. To succeed, we will have to redefine how society thinks about pardons, and how the government responds to the worthy people seeking them.

This report will review the efforts we have made, and what we have achieved, in the first year of PLSE's Pardon Project. While much remains to be done, the significant reforms that have already been made – thanks to the leadership of recently-elected Lieutenant Governor John Fetterman and recently-appointed Board Secretary Brandon Flood – are generating new hope among those with criminal record histories, and creating new partnerships with professional and community organizations willing to help them.

These remarkable changes would not have been possible without the grants and contributions PLSE receives from a small but growing list of foundations and individual donors. Please know how much we appreciate the confidence you have placed in us. We will continue to use your money efficiently and effectively.

Pennsylvania is perfectly positioned to lead national change. We must seize the moment. There is much more to do, and many reasons to be optimistic. And there's no time to lose.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tobey Oxholm".

Carl "Tobey" Oxholm III
Interim Executive Director

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past year (September 2018 - August 2019), PLSE's accomplishments include:

I. Redefinition of the Pardon Issue

- Began to redefine what a “pardon” is, from being an act of governmental “forgiveness,” granted as a matter of grace to individuals whom society can be confident will never again commit a crime, to a crucial public policy response to the legacy of mass incarceration and the persistent, inter-generational poverty of families and neighborhoods;
- Commissioned the first-ever study, undertaken by the Economy League and funded by the Lenfest Foundation, of whether pardon reform could have an economic impact on low-income/high-arrest neighborhoods; and
- Began to enlist professional associations, trade organizations, workforce development agencies, unions, foundations and the public in advocating for pardon reform.

II. Administrative Reform

- Established a close working relationship with the Pennsylvania Board of Pardons;
- Successfully advocated for a complete change in the pardon application form, making it far more accessible to the average (unrepresented) citizen; and
- Proposed new procedures for investigating and hearing applications for pardons that could result in thousands of applications for pardon being considered by the Board of Pardons at each public hearing, not just dozens.

III. Community Action

- Developed electronic media (videos and a new computer app) to explain the pardon process and help individuals work through it (with fall 2019 as the expected release date);
- Developed, and then refined through experience, a process and MOU for turning existing community-based organizations into “Pardon Hubs” - local resources where people with criminal records can go for help and encouragement in preparing pardon applications;
- Began turning 5 community-based organizations into Pardon Hubs;
- Enlisted 2 law firms and 2 bar associations to provide pro bono attorneys to help low-income clients prepare and submit their applications;
- Developed a comprehensive resource guide for attorneys willing to represent pardon clients for free and held 5 Continuing Legal Education programs for lawyers willing to volunteer; and
- Referred 23 PLSE clients to pro bono lawyers for help with their pardon applications.

PLSE was able to accomplish all of this while:

- Increasing the number of presentations we made to impacted communities and other key stakeholders about the creation, dissemination and destruction of criminal records;
- Increasing the number of clients we served and expungement petitions we filed on their behalf; and,
- Being one staff attorney down for almost half the year.

These accomplishments are discussed in the following pages. Any of the reports, resolutions, appendices or other documents mentioned in this report are available upon request.

I. INTRODUCTION

For years, Pennsylvania has had one of the highest rates among the states of citizens arrested, convicted, serving time in prison, on parole, and on probation. Because employers, landlords, banks, credit agencies, government agencies, and others consider arrest and conviction rates as part of background checks, criminal records pose overwhelming obstacles to a returning citizen's success.¹ Even as prosecutors and judges focus on reducing the numbers of those headed to and housed in our prisons, one certain legacy of mass incarceration will be the vast numbers of people who are electronically branded "criminals" thanks to the 24/7/365 online availability of criminal history record information.

In 2018, Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity (PLSE) conducted a review of the files of the 3000 clients we had represented since our founding² and determined that more than half still had at least one conviction on their criminal records after going through the expungement process. If our data were representative, there could be as many as 100,000 low-income residents of Philadelphia with convictions who have been living productive, conviction-free lives in their neighborhoods for at least five years, for whom a pardon could open doors to very different futures for themselves and their families.

In sharp contrast to this potential demand, the statewide Board of Pardons³ has never reviewed (much less recommended) more than 500 pardon applications in any one year.

II. REDEFINING THE ISSUE

So few pardons are granted every year that it hardly seems worth it to apply – or to spend much time or effort working to reform the pardon system. But the low numbers only prove the high importance of the issue.

Pennsylvania has among the highest rates in the country for arrests, incarceration, probation and parole. On average, over 200,000 new criminal cases are initiated every year in Pennsylvania. Even if police, prosecutors, and judges significantly change their approach and send significantly fewer people to prison, the number of Pennsylvanians who will have a permanent criminal record is vast and will continue to grow. A 2018 report on poverty released by the Pew Foundation reported that, on average, 25,000 people are released to Philadelphia from federal, state and local

¹ Philadelphia's "Fair Chance Employment Law" (formerly known as "ban the box"), City Code § 9-3504, makes it illegal for any employer to check an applicant's criminal record before making an offer of employment; but with criminal records being readily available over the internet in three clicks, the law is impossible to enforce, except against employers who somehow admit what they've done.

² From its founding in 2011 until 2018, PLSE focused its efforts primarily on community education and representing individual, low-income clients in the judicial process to expunge (erase) as much of their criminal records as the law allowed. In its most recent year, PLSE filed almost 3000 expungement petitions on behalf of over 800 clients while employing only one full-time attorney for most of the year.

³ The Constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania gives the power to grant clemency (including pardons) to the Governor, but only upon the recommendation of a Board of Pardons. Article IV (Executive), Section 9 (Pardoning Power; Board of Pardons).

jails and prisons every year, and 91% of those coming from state prison are returning to low-income communities.⁴ This legacy of mass incarceration will last for decades and generations.

In sharp contrast, the highest number of pardons ever recommended in one year by the Pennsylvania Board of Pardons was 288 (in 2016) – fewer than 5% of those who began the pardon process. The number is so very low primarily because the application form and process was – at least until 2019 – exceedingly difficult, even if an applicant can afford the \$5000 - \$15,000 that attorneys typically charge for pardon application representation (which low income applicants clearly cannot).

Pennsylvania, as all states⁵, defines a pardon as an act of grace that is extended by the state only to those who have clearly demonstrated that they have learned their lessons, redeemed themselves, changed their ways, and been “reborn” as productive citizens. As long as this approach persists, there is no possibility that pardons could help the tens of thousands who deserve a second chance.

Over the past year, PLSE worked to change the definitions of both the problem and the solution. Today, there is a growing appreciation of the many aspects of what people are coming to understand is, in reality, a public health and public welfare crisis:

- **Criminal records are a major factor in creating and perpetuating inter-generational poverty.** The United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey recently focused its mission on ending inter-generational poverty. PLSE succeeded in having the United Way recognize the substantial overlap between criminal records and poverty and, in the fall of 2018, PLSE received a grant from the United Way to develop ways to reach affected individuals and families through existing community organizations.
- **Criminal records are a major barrier to success for workforce development programs.** In 2019, the workforce development boards of Allegheny and Philadelphia Counties joined with PLSE in trying to focus the debate about pardons on the opportunity to earn a living wage. As H. Patrick Clancey, CEO and President of Philadelphia Works, wrote in support of a PLSE grant proposal (March 7, 2019):

“In so many cases, our efforts to place individuals into jobs that pay a living or family sustaining wage, for which many of them are qualified, are thwarted by the existence of a criminal or even an arrest record.... In our city, living wages equate to the first step out of poverty.”

⁴ Philadelphia’s Poor: Experiences From Below the Poverty Line – How financial well-being affects everything from health and housing to education and employment, Pew Foundation (September 26, 2018) <https://www.pewtrusts.org/research-and-analysis/reports/2018/09/26/philadelphias-poor-experiences-from-below-the-poverty-line>

⁵ It is this commonality of philosophy that gives Pennsylvania the opportunity to lead national change.

- **Criminal records are a heavy burden on taxpayers.** Speaking in favor of a pardon-reform resolution proposed by PLSE (January 2019), Philadelphia's City Solicitor Marcel Pratt explained:

"with 60% of a neighborhood's adults having a criminal record, ...it's not difficult to understand why there isn't enough money coming into low-income communities to support bodegas and other small businesses. [The elimination of criminal records is] a critical and essential neighborhood investment strategy. We have to get people working at their highest and best levels."

With the support of Philadelphia's District Attorney, Partner4Work, Philadelphia Works and others, the Lenfest Foundation awarded a grant to PLSE (March 2019) to fund a study on the effects that pardon reform could have on neighborhood finances. The Economy League's initial report is expected by the fall of 2019.

- **Criminal records are a public health crisis.** With between 25% to 60% of a neighborhood's adults having criminal record histories greatly limiting their options and threatening their futures, these records are as much a public health issue as guns and gun violence. For this reason, "employment and income" is identified as one of six key factors contributing to public health in the County Health Rankings & Roadmap model developed by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. As with other public health problems, the solutions lie in preparedness, mitigation, and response, and the creation of a culture that "promotes health." To attack the blight of criminal records, the community must own the problem and be actively engaged in providing the solutions. This is the organizing principle of PLSE's "Pardon Hubs" discussed below in Section IV.

Each of these definitions moves the focus of the inquiry away from assessing the moral rectitude of the individual and making a prediction about recidivism, to supporting the interests and objectives of society as a whole in maximizing the productivity and contributions of all of its members. "Allowing individuals to compete for jobs they are qualified for," "increasing the effectiveness of job training programs", and "reducing the need for public funds to be used in poor neighborhoods" are objectives that are shared regardless of political or social perspective. As applied to people who for years have been out of prison, or who were never incarcerated, and who have proven themselves to be no risk to the safety or security of others, there are few dissenters.

These reformulations of the issue resonate with very different interests, organizations and sectors of society, whose participation is essential to re-designing the system to respond to the need, today, for far, far greater numbers of "fresh starts". They also provide political "room" within which governmental leaders can consider and effect substantive and procedural change.

III. ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM

Pennsylvania is one of six states where 100 or more pardons are granted every year. It is the only one of the six where the pardon process takes longer than one year⁶ - in fact, it takes more than three times that long. In the spring of 2019, PLSE began a campaign that calls on the Governor and the Board of Pardons to reform the process so that as many applications as possible are heard within one year. Professional and trade associations, businesses and labor unions, and other organizations have begun to sign on.⁷

The pardon process is entirely within the discretion of Pennsylvania’s Board of Pardons (“the Board”). Pennsylvania’s Constitution (which creates the five-member Board) specifies that before a pardon can be recommended, there must be a “full hearing in open session, upon due public notice,” and that three votes are required for it to recommend a pardon.⁸ Other than those very few requirements, the Board can do as it pleases. Thanks to the leadership of the newly-elected Lieutenant Governor as the Board’s chair (January 2019) and of the newly-appointed Secretary (himself the recipient of a pardon) leading the administrative staff (April 2019), many of the reforms proposed by PLSE have already been made. And there are more to come.

I. The Application

An appallingly low percentage (under 20%) of those who begin the process of applying for a pardon reach the point of having their application filed. There are several reasons for this:

- The application (at least until June 2019) was 9 pages long, had 13 pages of instructions, was largely written in legal and bureaucratic terms, and required the submission of two reports that took six to nine months to obtain from other state agencies (the Pennsylvania State Police and Pennsylvania Department of Transportation).
- It was a printed form requiring handwritten or typed answers, error-free copying of a significant amount of data from government documents (that had to be attached), and responses in every blank space (e.g., “not applicable” instead of leaving the space blank for “middle name”), all of which required detailed review, took significant staff time, and resulted in the return for correction (rejection) of two-thirds of all applications.
- It required an enormous amount of information beyond “detailed facts of the incident, which much include how you were involved”, ranging from information about offenses

⁶ Alabama: 500 pardons granted per year in a process that takes approximately one year; Connecticut: 400 pardons granted per year in an approximately one-year process; Delaware: over 250 pardons granted per year in an approximately six-month process; Nebraska: over 100 pardons granted per year in an approximately one-year process; Oklahoma: 100 pardons granted per year in an approximately six-month process.

⁷ Re-Entry Committee of the PA Workforce Development Board, Philadelphia Bar Association, Southeastern Pennsylvania Manufacturing Association, District Council 1199C, UniteHere Local 634, Brown’s Sure Save.

⁸ PA Constitution, Article IV, Section 9, paragraph (a): “... but no pardon shall be granted, nor sentence commuted, except on the recommendation in writing of a majority of the Board of Pardons, and, in the case of a sentence of death or life imprisonment, on the unanimous recommendation in writing of the Board of Pardons, after full hearing in open session, upon due public notice.”

committed as a juvenile and all traffic citations ever received, to “the specific need for clemency” and essays about “What efforts have you made to rehabilitate and improve yourself?” and “How have you contributed to the community?”

- It was expensive for people with limited incomes – over \$100 including application and filing fees, copies, photographs, and mailing costs.

Other than these administrative requirements, the form required the self-disclosure – in what is a public document – of facts which statutory and decisional law promises will not be public: records from juvenile court, records relating to charges that had been successfully avoided due to first-time-offender diversion programs (ARD - accelerated rehabilitative disposition), and criminal history data that a court has ordered be forever expunged (erased).⁹

Over the course of 2018 and into 2019, PLSE met almost monthly in Harrisburg with the leadership of the Board of Pardons – its Secretary, the Chief of Staff to the Lieutenant Governor (who chairs the Board of Pardons), a Deputy General Counsel, and various staff – to discuss (and object to) various aspects of these forms and propose ways that the process might be reformed. On June 10, 2019, the Board of Pardons released an entirely new application form that the Philadelphia Bar Association Chancellor called “revolutionary”. The new application:

- is available over the internet, and is free to obtain and file¹⁰;
- is only five pages long and is written in words that are commonly used;
- eliminates most of the ways mistakes were commonly made in the past;
- eliminates the need to obtain and attach records from the Pennsylvania State Police and PennDOT (and the long waiting time and significant expense involved in obtaining them);
- gives the applicant the choice of whether or not to include a personal statement; and
- clearly explains that an applicant does not have to include any information about any criminal charges that a judge has expunged (erased) from the applicant’s record¹¹.

As the Chancellor noted, for the very first time, this new form “put the possibility of a pardon within the reach of thousands of Pennsylvanians, especially those who are unable to afford an attorney.” In announcing the reforms, the Secretary of the Board of Pardons “thank[ed] 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.”¹²

⁹ The illegality of these requests was highlighted in a Resolution proposed by PLSE that was adopted by both the Philadelphia Bar Association (January 29, 2019) and the Allegheny County Bar Association (March 5, 2019).

¹⁰ In November 2018, the Board adopted PLSE’s recommendation to eliminate fees for applicants being represented by PLSE, other legal aid/pro bono organizations that only represent low-income people, and pro bono attorneys.

¹¹ While the Board did not accept PLSE’s arguments as to juvenile records or successfully completed ARDs, we have been advised that the Board is continuing to consider our arguments. PLSE has discussed with the Secretary of the Board the likelihood that some PLSE pardon clients will object and/or decline to provide answers to those questions in a public document; and the Board is also considering a rule that would delete from the public record the answers to those questions.

¹² The quotes in this paragraph appeared with the speakers’ permissions in the press release issued by PLSE on June 11, 2019.

As described in Part IV of this report, this new, simplified form also eliminated many of the barriers that were frustrating PLSE’s efforts to mobilize the community to get involved.

2. The Investigation

After an application for pardon is accepted and filed, the Board of Pardons forwards it to the Board of Probation and Parole (DPP) for investigation and report back. As of February 2019, DPP had an inventory of 1200 clemency applications awaiting assignment to an investigator – a backlog that the department estimated would take two full years to clear. A cost of the current investigative process is that 15% of all completed pardon applications are “lost” - that is, the investigations are not completed and so the applications never reach the Board of Pardons for consideration.

The investigation conducted by DPP includes a two-page list of requests covering fourteen different categories of information that the form itself calls “wide ranging”. Among other things, the questions seek the square footage of each place the applicant has lived over the past ten years, the amounts of all bank accounts, investments and loans, contact information for all work supervisors over the past ten years, current market value of any vehicle, and a list of every “police contact since your offense[, including] the date of the contact, the police department name, and the reason for the contact.”

DPP has asserted that these are all “criminogenic risk factors” which are necessary to obtain “a complete picture” of the applicant. In most instances, the scientific literature simply does not support such a claim. In fact, the principal assumption driving the inquiry appears to be that the poorer someone is, the fewer options they will have if something goes wrong in their lives, and thus the higher the likelihood they will have to resort to crime. In a written memorandum supplied to the Board (June 2019), PLSE has argued that in addition to having no scientific merit, this approach criminalizes poverty and is likely unconstitutional.

Moreover, the investigation is exactly the same for all applicants, regardless of what the crime was, how many years ago the conviction occurred, the applicant’s age at the time of the offense, or how many years the person has been living in the community without further offense. If the conviction was for retail theft in 1991, or for drug use when the applicant was 18 and she is now 37 with no subsequent convictions, is such a searching investigation even necessary? PLSE has challenged the Board to rethink what it really needs to know about people whose criminal records date back many years if not decades, and to identify criteria by which it could “fast track” certain applications as meriting a “presumptive pardon.”

3. The Hearing

As noted earlier, Pennsylvania’s Constitution requires that there be a “full hearing in open session” on every application for clemency. As currently implemented, the Board meets four times each year and provides fifteen minutes per application to hear from the applicant, the victim, the district attorney, and anyone else. This process necessarily limits the number of applications

that can be heard on any one day, and precludes using the pardon process as a meaningful remedy for mass incarceration.

In 2019, PLSE proposed that the Board adopt a “consent agenda” approach by which it could list hundreds of individuals for approval (e.g., those whom it has identified as meriting a “presumptive pardon”), ask at the public hearing if there were any objections to any person appearing on the list, remove the name of anyone as to whom an objection was lodged, and then vote to approve all the rest in a single vote. This was supported by an opinion letter issued for PLSE on June 24, 2019 by the Philadelphia law firm Duane Morris LLC:

“PLSE’s proposal likely comports with the intent of the framers in requiring a ‘full hearing,’ and, as a result, is likely constitutional. At a minimum, this research confirms that no authority forecloses PLSE’s proposal as unconstitutional.”

This opinion letter was immediately provided to the Board of Pardons, the Lieutenant Governor (who chairs the Board), and the General Counsel to the Governor, and is under active consideration at this time.

IV. COMMUNITY ACTION

Only a minuscule percentage of the public is aware of the existence of a state pardon process, and of those who have heard about pardons, most know that one is almost impossible to get, and therefore a waste of time even to try. The major changes that have been made to the form over the past year significantly changed that calculus.

Even so, there is still a five-page form and a three-year process that must be overcome just to get a hearing in front of the Board, and there are hundreds of thousands of low-income Pennsylvanians who could have their lives changed by the process, but cannot afford an attorney to help them tell their stories.

The scale of the issue, and the fact that the harms of criminal record histories hit low income people the hardest, is what makes this a public health crisis. As with other public health issues, the solutions lie in preparedness, mitigation, and response, and the creation of a culture that “promotes health.” In short, the community must own the problem and be actively engaged in providing the solutions.

I. Pardon Hubs

PLSE believes that the non-profits currently serving low-income communities provide the best and most sustainable approach to addressing the crisis. Their missions are to serve the community. They are accessible to, and trusted by, those who live and work nearby. They are places where people already go for help, and they can readily provide the information that’s needed. They can “screen” for the problem (at program intakes or at registration for events) and assist those who “test positive” (acknowledge that they or a member of their family have a criminal record) through staff and volunteers.

In the fall of 2018, PLSE began trying to recruit non-profits to become “Pardon Hubs”. PLSE had a clear set of expectations, and developed a detailed Memorandum of Understanding by which the non-profit would agree to a variety of different “expectations”, ranging from the frequency of community education programs and scheduled office hours held by staff or volunteers, to the number of other non-profits in the same neighborhood that it would recruit, to the amount the organization would contribute or raise for PLSE every year (\$5,000). As a vision, the MOU was comprehensive and well-constructed; but as a working relationship, it was not attractive to organizations that were under-funded, under-staffed and over-worked.

As a result of many interactions with non-profit leaders who were eager to get involved, PLSE substantially changed its expectations for what a “Pardon Hub” could be. Now, PLSE invites community organizations to participate to the degree, and at the speed, that best fits them, requiring only that they train their client-facing staff about criminal records and the pathways to clearing them up, and make written materials readily available to their clients, participants, and the public. As of June 2019, our Pardon Hubs¹³ (and the neighborhoods they serve) are:

- **Bebashi: Transition to Hope** (Spring Garden) – In August, 2019, PLSE will train Bebashi’s staff, and the following month, Bebashi will begin hosting community education programs in criminal records, expungements and pardons. Pardon-related legal services will be provided pro bono (free) by The Barristers’ Association of Philadelphia.
- **Diversified Community Services** (Point Breeze) – DCS hosted its first PLSE expungement clinic in June 2019 and is currently developing a year-long schedule for intake clinics and pardon-related programming. It is also creating a separate program for elderly (70+) residents whom the law allows to obtain expungement of entire records without a pardon.
- **Public Health Management Corporation** (Callowhill) – PMHC operates more than 350 health programs in 70 locations. In August 2019, it will begin offering a nurse-based approach at its Care Clinic, and developing a model that it can then modify as needed to fit other health care programs and locations.
- **SELF, Inc.** (Tioga, Hunting Park and Wyoming) – In August 2019, PLSE will train SELF’s client-facing staff in the pardon form and process.
- **Uplift Solutions** (Stenton) – Beginning in January 2019, PLSE has worked with every new class of participants in Uplift’s re-entry workforce program (up to 35 participants per class) providing criminal record expungement services and assistance to those for whom a pardon is a reasonable possibility. In the fall of 2019, PLSE expects to open its Pardon Project to Uplift’s 100+ program graduates.

¹³ At the same time it is creating Pardon Hubs, PLSE is continuing to expand the number of community partners and locations where it offers community education and expungement-related services. The only those organizations listed here are that have agreed to both make printed information about pardons easily accessible to clients/ participants and the public and have their staff be trained in the pardon system are listed here.

PLSE is pursuing these community partnerships with the support and assistance of several organizations that are providing introductions and connections to their constituents. We are in the process of developing a wide range of organizational partners, including the United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey, the Urban League of Philadelphia, JEVS Human Services, Interfaith Philadelphia, and Episcopal Community Services.

2. Legal Community Support

As noted earlier, the Bar Associations of both Philadelphia and Allegheny County responded immediately to PLSE's requests and adopted Resolutions that called on the Board of Pardons to reform its operations. In addition, the following organizations have agreed to help PLSE with its new Pardon Project by providing volunteers:

- **Barristers' Association of Philadelphia** – which will hold its first Continuing Legal Education (CLE) program on representing low income clients in pardon applications on August 14, 2019, and thereafter begin to provide legal services to Bebashi (above)
- **Louis J. Brandeis Law Society** – which held the first such CLE program on September 17, 2018, after which the attendees agreed to help 10 PLSE clients with pardon applications; and will hold a second CLE program on August 27, 2019
- **Dechert LLP** – which hosted a CLE program on June 13, 2019 and agreed to represent 6 PLSE clients seeking pardons
- **Morgan Lewis LLP** – which also hosted a CLE program on June 13 and took 6 clients
- **Philadelphia Association of Paralegals** – which started providing volunteers for expungement petition drafting and review in November 2017

By the end of the first year, the Pardon Project was providing 23 low-income clients with free (pro bono) legal counsel who were trained in the pardon process.

3. Electronic Guidance for Pardon Applicants

No matter how many lawyers or community organizations participate in the Pardon Project, they will never reach all of the people for whom guidance and support would make all the difference in completing the forms and telling their stories to their best ability. For this reason, and with funding from the Thomas Skelton Harrison Foundation, PLSE has been developing two ways to provide helpful information electronically to anyone who wants it:

- **The PardonMe™ App** - Drexel University's ExCITe Center is working with PLSE to develop a web-based, mobile-friendly computer application that translates the pardon application form and instructions into a series of easily answered questions in video game format. The prototype is expected to be available in Fall 2019.
- **Pardon Video Library** – With the support of the Pennsylvania Board of Pardons and Drexel University's Dragon Productions, PLSE is creating a library of YouTube-style videos in which people who have gone through the pardon application process provide

insight, advice and encouragement. The first of more than a dozen videos are expected to be on PLSE's website by September 2019.

4. Pardon Project Steering Committee and Mike Lee Fellow

PLSE's Pardon Project Steering Committee first met on December 10, 2018. Its purpose is to provide feedback and advice to PLSE's executive director as the Pardon Project moves from concept into reality, expands into new neighborhoods with new partners, and seeks new ways for people to access the pardon system. The Committee is comprised of individuals who have criminal records and who are in the process of applying for a pardon, or who are thinking about it, or who have completed the process (both successfully and not). Meeting bi-monthly, the Steering Committee reviews what PLSE has done and proposes to do in the pardon space. It provided key feedback in deciding which topics should be addressed in the Video Library and comments on the rough cuts of each video as it is being produced, and its members will be the first to beta test the new PardonMe™ App. Its members have also introduced PLSE to community organizations willing to host expungement intake sessions and/or consider being Pardon Hubs. The Committee is led by Josie Reed, a member of the PLSE Board of Directors who herself succeeded in obtaining a pardon. One objective set for the Steering Committee (helping to grow community leaders) was achieved when one of its most active members, Akeem Sims, was elected to the PLSE Board of Directors in June 2019.

In June 2018, PLSE created the Mike Lee Fellowship in Criminal Justice. Named in honor of PLSE's founding Executive Director and funded by his friends and colleagues, the six-month fellowship with PLSE is intended for people who have lived experience with the criminal justice system, who aspire to a career in criminal justice or community organizing in Philadelphia, and who have demonstrated a commitment to community and to social equity. The first recipient, Jarue Lawson, compiled an impressive record of community outreach and connecting PLSE to neighborhoods heavily impacted by the scourge of criminal record histories. The Mike Lee Fellow also serves on the Pardon Project Steering Committee.

V. CONCLUSION

Over its first year, the PLSE Pardon Project has gone from concept to reality. Our audacious goal of producing 2000 quality pardon applications per year solely from Philadelphia's low-income population remains beyond our grasp at the end of this first year. But the success we have had in making the pardon application more easily understood and freely available, and in spreading awareness of the issue to organizations and people whose support is essential to the program's success, is already generating new hope among those who can most benefit from the process and new partnerships with professional and community organizations willing to help them.

As we enter the Pardon Project's second year, we have good reason to believe there will be more changes made by the Board of Pardons to how it conducts its operations and investigations, and that more community-based organizations will begin providing information about pardons and support to the people who live and work in the neighborhoods they serve.

As this report began, so it ends – by thanking those who have supported our efforts with grants and personal contributions. With the press regularly covering issues of criminal justice reform, an increasingly-engaged public, and a Lieutenant Governor personally committed to second chances, we must push forward with renewed energy.

This moment, and its opportunities, must be seized. We cannot do it alone. Join us.