



🔗 | [Back \(https://triblive.com/opinion/aaron-moore-too-many-pardons-no-way-too-few/\)](https://triblive.com/opinion/aaron-moore-too-many-pardons-no-way-too-few/) | Text Size: - +

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# Aaron Moore: Too many pardons? No — way too few.

**TRIB LIVE** AARON MOORE | Monday, November 13, 2023 7:00 p.m.



BRIAN C. RITTMAYER | TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Aaron Moore, left, and Arnold Councilman Phil McKinley await primary election results May 16 at McKinley's P&M Pizza.

You may have seen the news last January that outgoing Gov. Tom Wolf had granted 2,540 pardons over his two terms. They were recommended by the Pennsylvania Board of Pardons, which you've probably never heard of. This past week, that board recommended 114 more people for pardons, bringing their total to just under 400 this year alone. And there's another 250 or so on their way in January.

What's going on? That's way too many, right?

No.

I have a criminal record. You might know that, because my opponents in the race for Arnold City Council tried to make a lot out of the fact that I have a record, and you shouldn't be voting for people with criminal convictions.

I was arrested in October 1991 in a sting called Operation Trigger Lock. On the advice of my court-appointed attorney, I pled guilty to the misdemeanor of "intentional possession of a controlled substance by a person not registered" and was sentenced to probation and payment of restitution and costs of over \$1,000. That was 32 years ago. I had just turned 20. I completed my sentence. But because my record is public, it can still be used against me.

A little history about me. I grew up in public housing, in a single-rent home, where the role models of success were limited. Like most of the young kids I grew up with, I found comfort in hanging in the streets. We were overlooked or stigmatized not only for living in public housing but also for living "below the tracks."

Today, I'm 52. Over the past 32 years, I have had to "check the box" in too many applications to count out myself as having a criminal record.

I'm lucky that the conviction that is on my record didn't stop me from getting certain jobs, but it did prevent me from getting jobs that would have allowed me to comfortably take care of my family. A drug conviction is an almost automatic "no" for jobs, training, schools, financial aid, loans, housing — heck, under public housing rules today, I would have been evicted from my home. My family, too.

Now, with the pardon, I don't have to check the box any more. When I got it in the mail, you cannot imagine the load I felt coming off my shoulders. To be honest, I didn't realize I was carrying it — but I know it now. For the first time, ever, no one can use my record to knock me down anymore. I learned to keep pressing forward, to be intentional and to never give up. I succeeded by keeping my head up my eyes open and most importantly never losing hope.

Now, with the pardon, I can be an example to others like me who messed up once, twice, even three times and have been doing their very best ever since, but always running into walls. Like them — like most of us — I'm not rich, connected or privileged. But I did get a pardon. Now I am proof that there can be a second chance for just about anyone who turns their life around. I will be hope to those who feel hopeless. I'm excited now to think about what could be next for me.

And isn't that really what all of us want? Making sure people who've committed crimes fully "repay their debt to society" for sure, and finish the sentence the judge put on them; but after that, getting back to work, making the best they can of their abilities and their potential, contributing their best for themselves, their families, and our community. Right?

There are thousands — yes, thousands — of "criminals" just like me right here in Westmoreland County. Isn't it time to let us get back up and into the game?

Aaron Moore was elected to Arnold City Council on Nov. 7 and will take his seat in January. He and others will be starting a Pardon Project in Westmoreland County, joining a network of similar community efforts around the state. For more information about pardons and how to apply, visit [PardonMePA.org](https://PardonMePA.org).

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