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POST-SENTENCE BARRIERS KEEP MILLIONS OF PEOPLE FROM RE-ESTABLISHING THEIR LIVES AND BUILDING A PROMISING FUTURE

NEW REPORT EXPOSES THE LASTING EFFECTS OF “PERMANENT PUNISHMENTS” AND THE DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACT ON PEOPLE OF COLOR

CHICAGO, June 29, 2020 – Data released today as part of a first-of-a-kind study confirms that more than 3.3 million people in Illinois could be impacted by permanent punishments as a result of prior “criminal justice system” involvement, which is more accurately referred to as the “criminal legal system” given the well-documented inequities that bring into question whether the system actually brings justice to people who come into contact with it.

According to the report, [“Never Fully Free: The Scale and Impact of Permanent Punishments on People with Criminal Records in Illinois.”](#) permanent punishments are the numerous laws and barriers aimed at people with records that limit their human rights and restrict access to the crucial resources needed to re-build their lives, such as employment, housing, and education. The report recommends a broad dismantling of permanent punishments, so that those who have been involved with the criminal legal system have the opportunity to fully participate in society.

New data illustrates the dramatic number of people who may be living with the stigma and limitations of a criminal record in Illinois. **Since the advent of mass incarceration in 1979, there are an estimated 3.3 million adults who have been arrested or convicted of a crime in Illinois.** Under current laws, these individuals have limited rights even after their criminal legal system involvement has ended. In fact, the report uncovered a vast web of 1,189 laws in Illinois that punish people with criminal records, often indefinitely.

“Our society is in the midst of a long-overdue reckoning that is requiring us to completely rethink the criminal legal system and create one that fosters healing and opportunity rather than perpetuates harm,” said Evelyn Diaz, President of Heartland Alliance. “We need to create a model that empowers those with a record to rebuild their lives, freely and without permanent punishments to inhibit their basic human rights.”

Key findings include:

- There are **1,189 unique permanent punishment** laws in Illinois. These state laws collectively act in **1,260 ways impacting people’s access to housing, employment, education and more.**
- Nearly **3.3 million adults** were arrested or convicted of a crime in Illinois since 1979.
- 982 permanent punishment laws in Illinois create punishments that **prevent or hinder access to employment.**
- Black people make up 13.8% of Illinois’s adult population but **28.9% of those who acquired arrest or conviction records**, 34.9% of people who were convicted of crimes, and 45.3% of people who were convicted of felonies.

- **627,945 adults, or 19.2% of all people with an arrest record, were not convicted of a crime.** Some permanent punishments still create barriers for those arrested but not convicted, and arrests can contribute to stigma because they can appear in some background checks and online searches.
- **Black women make up 14.5% of all adult women in Illinois, but over a third of all women arrested or convicted of a crime.**

“Permanent punishment laws make it so people with criminal records continue to be punished long after serving their sentences, often for a lifetime,” said Heartland Alliance Director of Research and primary report author, Katie Buitrago. “Especially after we have just commemorated the liberation of enslaved Black people in the U.S. on Juneteenth, and are on the cusp of celebrating the Fourth of July, we must reckon with the fact that we still have not achieved true freedom for millions of people in our own communities.”

In order for Illinois to provide people who have been involved in the criminal legal system an opportunity to fully participate in society, “Never Fully Free” calls for sweeping policy change to dismantle permanent punishment laws, including:

- Reforming laws that prescribe background checks and rules that prevent licensure required for many professions.
- Dismantling barriers to education, thus opening up opportunities for people to get quality jobs with living wages, allowing them to contribute more fully to their family, society, and the economy.
- Prioritizing safe and stable housing for people with criminal records in order to prevent homelessness, support them while transitioning back into their communities or during other times of need, and provide a foundation to be able to engage in education and employment.

“[Never Fully Free](#)” includes data on people with records, videos from people with records, and related infographics are available for download at www.heartlandalliance.org/NeverFullyFree. All data images are to be credited to the Heartland Alliance Social IMPACT Research Center-[contact IMPACT](#) for assistance accessing and interpreting local data.

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Heartland Alliance, one of the world’s leading anti-poverty and human rights organizations, works in communities in the U.S. and abroad to serve people experiencing homelessness, living in poverty, or seeking safety. The organization provides a comprehensive array of services and advocates for policy change in the areas of safe and justice, health and healing, and economic opportunity.

Heartland Alliance’s Social IMPACT Research Center conducts research that helps leaders create change and advance real-world solutions to poverty. Follow IMPACT on twitter at twitter.com/impactheartland. For more info, visit www.heartlandalliance.org/research/