



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 14, 2019

Lt. Gov. Fetterman's pardons-related fee reform unanimously approved

Harrisburg, PA – Lieutenant Governor John Fetterman's push to eliminate application fees for pardons was approved Thursday morning in a public vote of the state's Board of Pardons. The change is a first step to streamlining the pardons process, scrapping some nuisance fees that discourage remorseful people from pursuing help with cleaning up their records.

During a public meeting, the five-person board voted unanimously to ditch \$63 in fees collected at several points throughout the process of applying for a pardon. The regulation-mandated fee for pardon applications will be reduced to \$0 for those who initiate the application starting on or after Monday, March 18, 2019.

"The people applying for these pardons are already paying for their past mistakes," said Lt. Gov. Fetterman, who chairs the board. "It benefits nobody to pile onto the economic disadvantages that cause criminal behavior and that are caused by criminal behavior."

In a perpetuated cycle, Pennsylvanians with criminal records often come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. After conviction and/or incarceration, they face greater difficulty finding jobs and housing, and even securing credit cards.

The Board of Pardons reviews submitted applications and victim testimony to select which cases to forward to the Governor for clemency or a pardon. People convicted of criminal cases ranging from summary offenses to death penalty cases may make requests to have their cases reviewed.

The applications submitted, however, are generally older violations of lesser-graded crimes.

Applicants must currently pay \$8 just to download the application online or to secure a copy through the mail. Then they must pay \$20 for a criminal history record and \$10 for a driving record through Penn DOT. When the application is complete, the Board of Pardons collects a \$25 processing fee.

Thousands of people per year pay the \$8 to download the application, but most of them don't proceed through the rest of the process. In 2017, more than 3,400 people downloaded the application, but only 564 completed it and paid the final \$25 processing fee.

Fetterman said finances are clearly one obstacle to completion, and this change will allow more people to participate in a program that could change their lives and help them to be more productive citizens.

Governor Tom Wolf applauded the change.

"I thank the Board of Pardons for waiving its application fee, making the pardons and commutation process accessible to all, regardless of their financial situation," Gov. Wolf said. "Our criminal justice system needs fewer barriers based on someone's economic status and this change is an example of how we can move towards more fairness for people in poverty."