

PRESS RELEASE

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NEW ECONOMY LEAGUE STUDY EXPLORES ECONOMIC IMPACT OF PENNSYLVANIA LEGAL PARDONS

Evaluating a decade's worth of data, the Economy League's in-depth study analyzes pardons and proposes policy options to increase pardons as a positive economic tool.

PHILADELPHIA (Apr. 22, 2020) – The Economy League of Greater Philadelphia released its new report, *Pardons as an Economic Investment Strategy: Evaluating a Decade of Data in Pennsylvania*, today. The study found that the average pardon filed between 2008-2017 took three years to process; 38.2% of pardons filed during this period were granted, and these pardons resulted in a positive economic impact of \$16 million. In addition, Pennsylvanians reentering society from the justice system as a result of a legal pardon often return to low-income neighborhoods in the state's major cities, with Philadelphia being the most common destination.

In *Pardons as an Economic Investment Strategy: Evaluating a Decade of Data in Pennsylvania* [economyleague.org/pardonimpact], the Economy League of Greater Philadelphia, under a grant from the Lenfest Foundation, studied how pardons have helped Pennsylvanians with criminal records to improve their economic circumstances and benefit their local community.

“The Lenfest Foundation is focused on creating high-quality career pathways that equip youth and young adults with the necessary knowledge, skills, experiences and credentials to succeed in the 21st-century economy,” said Keith Leaphart, D.O, Chair of the Foundation’s Board of Directors. “But we’ve learned there is little hope of that future for the thousands, if not tens of thousands, of people who had run-ins with the criminal justice system when they were young. This study makes it clear that permanent criminal history records are not just keeping individuals and their families in poverty, but whole neighborhoods. We thank Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity for bringing this issue to our attention, and the Economy League for its path-breaking work.”

This report, which builds on the Economy League’s 2011 findings in, *The Economic Benefits of Employing Formerly Incarcerated Individuals in Philadelphia*, demonstrates that pardons can be viewed as more than just individual acts of clemency, but also a no-cost community reinvestment policy. Pardons are a powerful workforce development tool that can help uplift not only individuals, but the communities in which they reside and the economies in which they contribute.

“The facts are clear: we all benefit when people who’ve paid their debt to society and are ready to contribute to our community have the opportunity to truly get a second chance,” said Josh Shapiro, Pennsylvania Attorney General. “I applaud the Economy League’s efforts, which analyzed how the Board of Pardons operates and how

these decisions can affect individuals, families and communities across Pennsylvania. Over the last three years, I have worked closely with my fellow board members to streamline the pardon process so that we can consider more applications faster while also ensuring that we fully weigh the individual facts and circumstances of each applicant necessary to ensuring justice and upholding public safety. We will continue to improve the pardons process with this data in mind to make all of our communities safer, stronger, and better-off.”

The Economy League’s report aggregates state-wide data, particularly the U.S. Census 2017 American Community Survey five-year estimates, the Pennsylvania Uniform Crime Reporting System, and clemency application data provided by the Pennsylvania Board of Pardons. The report has several key findings:

- The average pardon grant rate during this 10-year period was 38.2%, has been 44.8% from 2015-2017, taking an average of 3.17 years to reach a decision per pardon;
- In 2017, pardon grant rates were consistent across racial groups, and in 2017 whites filed three times more pardon applicants than minorities;
- The rate of pardons granted in high-arrest counties falls below the statewide average;
- Pardons filed between 2008 and 2018 and ultimately granted allowed recipients to earn an estimated \$16 million in additional wages as of December 2019.

“One year ago this month, the Board of Governors of the Philadelphia Bar Association unanimously called on the Board of Pardons to hear as many pardon applications as it possibly could within one year of filing,” said Hon. A. Michael Snyder (ret.), Chancellor, Philadelphia Bar Association. “We did so because the backlog was preventing Pennsylvanians from obtaining jobs, housing, education, credit and other opportunities for which they are qualified. With this Report, the Economy League has put a hard number of what the delays beyond one year actually cost Pennsylvania. We again urge the Board to adopt procedures that will speed this important relief to deserving people and their communities across the state.”

Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry Secretary W. Gerard Oleksiak said, “One of our department’s key objectives is to make Pennsylvania’s workforce globally competitive, and that means preparing job seekers through employment and job training services. It’s enormously frustrating that a criminal record from 5, 10, even 15 years ago can stop them from getting good jobs today. This report shows that getting past those histories is key to Pennsylvania’s economic future. I applaud Lt. Governor Fetterman and the Board of Pardons for what they have already done to make pardons more accessible, and encourage them to keep going.”

This study proposes that the impact of granting pardons is magnified for no-cost at the community level as a workforce development and neighborhood investment tool. The Economy League explores various policy and practice options to expand this use and the economic impacts through: (1) Increasing the number of pardon applicants, (2) Increasing the share of applications that are granted pardons, and (3) Shortening the processing time – which if processing time were reduced by 25%, those who received pardons over the past 10 years could have earned \$6.9 million in additional income.

About the Economy League of Greater Philadelphia

The Economy League of Greater Philadelphia addresses critical issues facing Greater Philadelphia by providing impactful research, connecting diverse leaders, and advancing shared solutions. We envision a thriving Greater Philadelphia region powered by informed and collaborative leadership. Since its founding in 1909, the Economy League has believed that high-quality analysis and practical insight about the region’s most important challenges and opportunities, combined with collaborative, across-sector leadership are crucial drivers of prosperity in Greater Philadelphia.

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