

To: Interested Parties

From: GBAO

Date: May 2, 2019

Clean Slate Research – Key Findings

Federal clean slate legislation, built off the success of bi-partisan efforts across multiple states, was recently introduced in the House and is about to be introduced in the Senate as well. New national polling shows strong support for this proposed legislation, which would seal the records of individuals convicted of marijuana and other non-violent drug offenses, if the individual has completed his/her sentence and has not committed another offense.

GBAO conducted a nationally representative survey of registered voters in late April to measure public sentiment about clean slate and related issues involving the criminal justice system. We found 71% support the proposed clean slate legislation (37% strongly support) compared to just 19% opposed (8% strongly oppose). Even more striking than the 52-point margin in overall support is the breadth of support, as majorities across traditional dividing lines of gender, race, age, and partisan identification support the proposal. And this support holds strong, even in the face of a series of one-sided attacks on the proposed legislation.

CLEAN SLATE PROPOSAL

As you may know, Congress is considering a bipartisan proposal to automatically seal the records of individuals convicted of marijuana and other non-violent drug offenses, if the individual has completed his/her sentence and has not committed another criminal offense. Sealing their record does not make it disappear entirely, but it means their criminal record would not be disclosed when these individuals apply for a job, housing, or further education.

Supporters say such laws allow these individuals to move on with their lives, provide for their families, and become productive members of society.

Opponents say these laws make communities less safe by undermining the public's right to know about criminals in their communities.

Would you support or oppose legislation to automatically seal the records of individuals convicted of marijuana and other non-violent drug offenses if the person has completed his/her sentence and has not committed another criminal offense?

Clean Slate Proposal	Total	Dem	Ind	GOP	White	Af-Am	Hisp	<50	50+
Support	71	80	69	62	71	70	80	72	70
Oppose	19	11	18	29	19	19	15	17	21



In order to really test the strength of support for clean slate in the most stringent means possible, we tested a series of six attacks against the proposed clean slate legislation, followed by a revote with no countervailing messages in support of the proposal. Despite the one-sided nature of this test, clean slate maintained clear majority support (62% support, 27% oppose), with strong support (30%) still outweighing strong opposition (11%) by nearly 3-to-1. Democrats (74-17%), Independents (61-24%) and Republicans (50-41%) all support the proposal even after the attacks, as do majorities of every demographic subgroup.

We then tested a series of messages in support of clean slate, both to offer voters a more balanced perspective on the issue and to identify the most effective affirmative arguments. Each of the affirmative messages scored higher overall than any of the negative attacks, but four messages in particular emerged as most effective:

	Very convincing	Total convincing
Sealing a record is not the same as expunging a record or wiping it away, and an individual whose record is sealed isn't "getting away" with anything: if they are ever arrested again, law enforcement and the courts have access to their full record.	37%	67%
A criminal record shouldn't be a life sentence to poverty. This proposal will allow people with criminal records to move on with their lives, provide for their families, and become productive members of society.	34%	65%
Multiple studies show that people who do not commit another crime within 4 to 7 years are no more likely to commit a crime in the future than the general population. Yet the stigma of a criminal record can haunt them for the rest of their life.	33%	64%
We are putting too many people in prison for too long, and spending way too much in taxpayer dollars to keep them there - money that could be better spent on alternatives like education, job training, and services to help people successfully re-enter their communities.	33%	64%

After these affirmative messages – the most effective of which focused on themes of reassurance, opportunity, and cost to taxpayers – we tested overall support for the clean slate project one last time. After now hearing messages from both sides, support recovers much of the ground lost after the one-sided attacks on the proposal, with support at 67% and opposition at just 24%. Support still spans across partisan lines – Democrats at 79%, Independents at 63%, and Republicans at 55% -- and majorities of every demographic subgroup continue to express support.

With intensity on this issue so clearly on the side of support for clean slate, it is not surprising that the potential political impact of the issue leans heavily toward supporters. A majority of voters (51%) say they would be more likely to support a candidate who supports clean slate, while 16% would be less likely to support that candidate and 33% say it would make no difference in their vote decision.

The online survey was conducted by GBAO on April 22-25, 2019 among respondents drawn from a custom database of more than six million Americans recruited by phone, online, and through social media. Results are weighted to reflect national demographic statistics for registered voters. The survey carries a margin of error of 3.1 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level.