



PRESS RELEASE
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**U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Releases Report:
*Collateral Consequences: The Crossroads of Punishment,
Redemption and the Effects on Communities***

WASHINGTON – Today, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights released its [report](#), *Collateral Consequences: The Crossroads of Punishment, Redemption and the Effects on Communities*. Each year, federal and state prisons release more than 620,000 individuals, and even after completing their sentences, these individuals still face potentially thousands of collateral consequences upon reentering society. Individuals can face barriers to voting, jury service, holding public office, securing employment, obtaining housing, receiving public assistance, getting a driver's license, qualifying for college admission and financial aid, qualifying for military service, and maintaining legal status as an immigrant. The impact of each consequence extends past people with felony convictions to affect families and communities.

Chair Catherine E. Lhamon said, “These collateral consequences impose heavy burdens on formerly incarcerated persons’ ability successfully to reintegrate into free society and in so doing render all of us less equal and less safe. Congress, and local communities, should heed the call documented in these pages to lift unnecessary restrictions and speed effective reentry for formerly incarcerated people.”

Key findings from the Commission majority include:

- Collateral consequences exacerbate punishment beyond the criminal conviction after an individual completes the court-imposed sentence. Valid public safety bases support some collateral consequences; however, many are unrelated either to the underlying crime for which a person has been convicted or to a public safety purpose.
- Evidence shows harsh collateral consequences unrelated to public safety increase recidivism by limiting or by completely barring formerly incarcerated persons’ access to personal and family support.
- The general public, attorneys, and courts often lack knowledge of what the totality of the collateral consequences are in their jurisdiction, how long they last, and whether they are discretionary or mandatory, or even if they are relevant to public safety or merely an extended punishment beyond a sentence. This absence of awareness undermines any deterrent effect that might flow from attaching such consequences, separate and apart from the punishment itself, to criminal convictions.

Key recommendations from the Commission majority include:

- Collateral consequences should be tailored to serve public safety. Policymakers should avoid punitive mandatory consequences that bear no rational relationship to the offense committed, and impede people convicted of crimes from safely reentering and becoming contributing members of society. Jurisdictions should periodically review the consequences imposed by law or regulation to evaluate whether they are necessary to protect public safety and if they are related to the underlying offenses.
- Call on Congress to limit discretion of public housing providers to prevent them from categorically barring people with criminal convictions from access to public housing; lift restrictions on access to student loans based on criminal convictions, except for convictions related to financial fraud; eliminate restrictions on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits based on criminal convictions; and require federal courts to give comprehensive notice of federal restrictions on individuals' rights before guilty plea entry, upon conviction, and upon release from incarceration.

Collateral Consequences is based on expert and public input, extensive research and analysis, and testimony, findings, and recommendations from Commission State Advisory Committees in Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Ohio, Tennessee, and West Virginia.

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The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is the only independent, bipartisan agency charged with advising the President and Congress on civil rights and reporting annually on federal civil rights enforcement. Our 51 state Advisory Committees offer a broad perspective on civil rights concerns at state and local levels. The Commission: In our 7th decade, a continuing legacy of influence in civil rights. For information about the Commission, please visit www.usccr.gov and follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).