

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: MAY 17, 2014

POLICE RECORDS MAJOR BARRIER TO YOUTH EMPLOYMENT, REPORT FINDS

TORONTO - Ontario's lax approach to regulating the demand for and supply of police records creates significant financial and human costs the province cannot afford to ignore, claims a just released Report, [Help Wanted*: Reducing Barriers for Ontario's Youth with Police Records](#), from the John Howard Society of Ontario's *Centre of Research, Policy & Program Development*. The Report's findings expose the systemic exclusion of youth (15-29) with police records from labour market engagement in Ontario.

"In years past, having any contact with the police or even having a criminal record did not result in a permanent mark that lead to exclusion and discrimination from the workplace," states Jacqueline Tasca, Policy Analyst at the Centre. "In today's digitized world that situation is starkly different."

Many people erroneously assume a police record is synonymous with a record of conviction. However, police records are created for a wide variety of reasons including mental health contacts with police and instances where individuals have not been charged or convicted of any crime.

According to the most recent data, 43% of all adult criminal court cases in Ontario resulted in stayed or withdrawn charges. Despite the fact that none of these individuals were convicted of any charge, they all now have police records. These records are frequently disclosed as part of what is becoming increasingly more prevalent trend -- the request for police record checks for employment, volunteer, and academic purposes.

"The impacts of the disclosure of police records are devastating. This is especially true for young Ontarians from marginalized populations, such as those with mental health issues, who are even more likely to come into contact with the police and already face multiple barriers to accessing employment," states Ms. Tasca.

The Report offers unique insights into the hiring practices of Ontario employers. Centre Researcher & Program Evaluator Reza Ahmadi explains, "Our research found that half of the businesses surveyed required record checks of prospective employees; that larger businesses, employing disproportionately more people, were more likely to require record checks; and that 15% of those requiring record checks indicated they would never hire a youth with a police record, regardless of the record's relevance to the job position, severity or how long ago the record was acquired." In addition, the research results showed that employers expressed strong negative biases against youth with police records, characterizing these individuals as not being '...just as honest', being '...less reliable' and being a '...greater risk/liability' compared to other workers.

The Report raises serious questions as to whether police record checks are actually useful risk management tools, challenging the rising demand for and reliance on these tools by Ontario employers to screen prospective employees.

Among the Report's many recommendations, is the call for the immediate implementation of a two-pronged provincial strategy. The first focus should be placed on supporting youth with police records and improving their employability; the second focus should be to change the present legislative landscape in Ontario to make the province more conducive to reintegration and protective of privacy and human rights for all its citizens.

Other key Report recommendations include:

- All Ontario police services should immediately commit to ending the disclosure of non-conviction information on all levels of police record check;
- The provincial government should develop legislation protecting Ontarians from the disclosure of their non-conviction police records, as well as legislation to protect Ontarians from undue invasion of privacy in the hiring and pre-employment contexts;
- Ontario should implement legislative model and program that emulates B.C.'s *Criminal Records Review Act* and Criminal Records Review Program, to centralize, regulate and standardize the demand for and review of Vulnerable Sector Search checks in our province;
- The provincial government should amend the *Ontario Human Rights Code's* "record of offences" provision to broaden its definition to explicitly protect Ontarians against discrimination on the basis of *any* record of offences – which should include all non-conviction police records, mental health police contacts, criminal convictions and records that have been sealed subsequent to a record suspension; and,
- Employers in the private sector, public sector and non-profit sector should critically review their existing hiring practices and any use of police record checks with a view to the evidence around the utility of record checks and with a goal of minimizing the invasion of privacy and discrimination that flows from police record checks.

Another report released today from the Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA), entitled **False Promises, Hidden Costs: The Case for Reframing Employment and Volunteer Police Record Check Practices in Canada** echoes concerns about the use of police record checks, the type of information disclosed and the impact these practices have on individuals across Canada. This report can be found at www.ccla.org

To read the full report, **Help Wanted*: Reducing Barriers for Ontario's Youth with Police Records**, and all of the recommendations as well as JHSO's statement committing to adopting the HR best practices recommended in the Report, please visit: www.johnhoward.on.ca

On Tuesday, May 20, at 12 p.m., CCLA will host a discussion of **False promises, Hidden costs**, at CCLA offices (215 Spadina Ave., Suite 210, Toronto, ON), featuring Abby Dushman and CCLA General Counsel Sukanya Pillay. Media and the public are invited to attend. Michelle Keast, Director of the Centre of Research, Policy & Program Development at the John Howard Society of Ontario will also be speaking at the event about **Help Wanted***.

The [Centre of Research, Policy & Program Development](#) at the John Howard Society of Ontario advances the organization's mission of *effective and human responses to crime and its causes* by engaging in research, policy analysis, public education and program evaluation on behalf of our 19 local offices.

For more information, please contact:

Michelle Keast
Director, Centre of Research, Policy & Program Development
John Howard Society of Ontario
416.408.4282 ext. 234
mkeast@johnhoward.on.ca

[@ReducingCrime](#)