

# GJP's 2023 Legislative Update

In Georgia, each legislative session works on a two-year cycle. For the 2023-2024 session, Georgia Justice Project set out an ambitious legislative agenda in pursuit of our mission to reduce the number of Georgians who are under correctional control and remove barriers to reentry for formerly justice-involved individuals. We are excited about the substantial progress we made in 2023. We strengthened old partnerships, nurtured new relationships, and engaged lawmakers in advancing each of our priorities. After building significant momentum in 2023, we are hopeful to advance each bill when the two-year legislative session continues next year.

For more information, or a digital copy of this document with clickable links, go to [GJP.org/advocacy](https://gjp.org/advocacy).

## **Created Wide Support for [Omnibus Occupational Licensing Reform](#)**

In the summer of 2022, we partnered with Senator Brian Strickland to convene a task force to examine how Georgia can ensure barriers do not prevent qualified individuals with criminal records from working in licensed fields. Outside of the task force, GJP engaged more than 40 stakeholders to vet and build support for numerous proposals to change how and when criminal records are considered by state agencies making occupational licensing decisions. What resulted was a broad and passionate coalition that includes the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, Metro Chamber of Commerce, the Faith and Freedom Coalition, and numerous other vocal partners. Working together under Sen. Strickland's leadership, we pushed [SB 157](#) to the brink of passage in 2023. It will enter 2024 having already passed unanimously out of the Senate and will return to a House committee that unanimously recommended its passage earlier this year.

SB 157 is one of GJP's most ambitious initiatives to date. The 80-page bill would give Georgians clarity as to whether their criminal record will prevent them from entering a licensed field before spending time and resources on education and training; ensure that only relevant convictions that are recent or serious can be considered; give effect to expungements and pardons in licensing decisions; and provide due process protections for those pursuing licenses.

## **Built Momentum to [Expand Access to Expungement](#)**

We believe that a conviction should not create a lifetime of punishment. GJP continues to pursue policies to make expungement work better for more people, expanding its economic, dignitary, and crime-reduction benefits. [HB 334](#) would clean up unintended obstacles to expungement and remove barriers to misdemeanor expungement. HB 334 passed out of the House Judiciary Non-Civil committee but did not receive a vote in time to survive Crossover Day. We are grateful to Rep. Tyler Paul Smith for sponsoring this legislation and our partners in the business and non-profit communities for supporting it. We will continue to advocate for HB 334 in 2024.

## **Spread Awareness and Built Partnerships around [Victim-Centered Programs](#)**

In both our [direct services work](#) and at the State Capitol, GJP advocates for victim-centered approaches to crime that center the needs of those who experience harm. These approaches, designed to allow a victim to have a voice as to what accountability looks like with the goal of making them whole, are shown to reduce recidivism and can be used as a diversionary alternative to the traditional criminal legal system. These programs require open and honest communication to provide an opportunity for accountability, healing, and reintegration. [HB 382](#), sponsored by Rep. Teri Anulewicz, would make communications in victim-centered programs privileged in the same way they are in mediation, alternative dispute resolution, and other settings. HB 382 is supported by Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Georgia Commission on Family Violence, Street Grace, Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice, and 41 faith leaders. The House Judiciary committee unanimously passed HB 382, but it ran out of time before Crossover Day. We look forward to working with our partners to continue enabling and elevating victim-centered approaches to harm in 2024.

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