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**LEGAL SERVICES OF NEW JERSEY NEWSLETTER FOCUSES ON LAWS
HELPING PEOPLE OVERCOME PAST CRIMINAL RECORDS**

EDISON — The latest newsletter of Legal Services of New Jersey (LSNJ) centers on new laws easing the burden of past criminal records.

The bilingual publication, “Looking Out For Your Legal Rights,” may be viewed online at www.lsnjlaw.org.

The Fair Chance Housing Act (FCHA), which took effect in January, specifies that landlords before they make a conditional or initial housing offer cannot ask or consider an applicant’s criminal record other than convictions for producing drugs on a federal housing facility or a Megan’s Law conviction. Only afterwards can records of serious crimes be considered, and even then landlords have to meet various non-discriminatory conditions and standards.

The FCHA, said to be the first of its kind in the nation, is designed to ensure that people with past criminal histories have a fair opportunity at obtaining safe and affordable housing. The newsletter article lays out what people can do if landlords violate the law.

Another law enacted in January, eliminates or downgrades certain drug-related offenses, effectively opening the door to the past records being expunged. Specifically, the law makes legal what has been the criminal offense of possession of syringe or needle for personal use of a controlled substance, and downgrades to a non-indictable disorderly person offense when such paraphernalia is produced with intent to distribute.

Another change expands expungement edibility to people who have completed special probation programs, such as Drug Court.

The latest LSNJ newsletter also includes an article providing questions and answers detailing the availability of most of the major resources for dealing with Covid-19 issues.

Legal Services of New Jersey (LSNJ), located in Edison, heads the state's Legal Services system, a network of six independent nonprofit corporations and has been providing free essential legal aid in civil matters to low-income people through offices in all 21 counties for 55 years. Since its inception, LSNJ has provided representation in more than 2.7 million cases.

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