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Testimony from
Arthur Rizer, Director of Criminal Justice Policy, R Street Institute
on:

House Bill No. 178, “Provides relative to the suspension or deferral of sentence and probation in felony cases;”

House Bill No. 179, “Provides relative to certain conditions to expunge a record of arrest and conviction of a felony offense;”

House Bill No. 241, “Provides relative to expungement of records.”

May 26, 2020

Senate Judiciary Committee C

My name is Arthur Rizer, and I serve as the Director of Criminal Justice Policy and Civil Liberties for the R Street Institute, which is a nonprofit, center-right, public policy research organization. Our mission is to engage in policy research and outreach to promote free markets and limited, effective government. This is why HB 178, HB 179 and HB 241 are of special interest to us.

The current expungement process in Louisiana is cumbersome, highly bureaucratic and when citizens need lawyers to access their basic rights, put simply, the system isn’t working.

I served for almost 21 years in the U.S. Army, was deployed to Iraq, and was awarded the Bronze Star and two Purple Hearts for my service to this country. In addition to this, I have also been a law enforcement officer, a patrol officer in the state of Washington and an Assistant United States Attorney with the Department of Justice. As a result of this experience, I believe public safety is of paramount importance, and that individuals should be held accountable for the crimes they commit. But, I also believe that punishment should not be indefinite. Once a person has paid their debt to society and demonstrated that they have turned their life around, they deserve a second chance.

Past the damage to the individual, Louisiana’s economy suffers when so many people are burdened by a criminal record. The Center for Economic and Policy Research has estimated that in terms of cost to the

economy as a whole, the United States loses about \$78 billion in gross domestic product every year by excluding people with a criminal record from the workforce.¹ During this precarious time, as every state begins to assess how to restart their economy, Louisiana has the opportunity to shed these unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles by passing HB 178, HB 179, and HB 241. Together, this set of bills provides the opportunity to streamline the expungement process, without compromising on a commitment to public safety.

For these reasons, I urge this committee to pass HB 178, HB 179, and HB 241. Criminal records hold people—and the economy—back, and by helping people clear them, we also help ensure that more people are gainfully employed, that they have better housing and that our communities are safer.

Thank you for your consideration.

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¹ Alan Barber and Cherrie Bucknor, “The Price We Pay: Economic Costs of Barriers to Employment for Former Prisoners and People Convicted of Felonies,” Center for Economic and Policy Research, June 16, 2016. <https://cepr.net/images/stories/reports/employment-prisoners-felonies-2016-06.pdf>.