

North Shore DA's event allows 93 to clear criminal records

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Volunteers work with participants seeking to have arrests or convictions expunged from their criminal records during a recent event at the St. Tammany Parish

Courthouse spearheaded by North Shore District Attorney Warren Montgomery's office. Nearly 100 people were able to clear their criminal records during the program. (22nd Judicial District Attorney')

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Almost 100 people had old arrests and convictions for relatively minor crimes cleared from their records recently under a new program implemented by North Shore District Attorney Warren Montgomery.

In many cases, Montgomery said, those criminal records are a hurdle keeping some people from obtaining a job.

The program, called Fresh Start, allowed some people with arrests and convictions for some crimes to have those offenses expunged from their records, Montgomery said in a recent news release.

Under the program, participants were pre-screened to make sure they met the criteria and those who did gathered at the St. Tammany Justice Center last month to meet with Montgomery's staffers.

The program expedited the process by bringing all the agencies involved into the same room, which sped the paperwork. It also reduced the fees from \$550 to \$100 for each case expunged.

"The program was a tremendous success," Montgomery said. "There were lots of smiles and even some tears, as participants realized what this will mean for their lives, a better job or a chance to advance on the job. In turn, their stability and productivity help to create a safer community for us all."

Montgomery's office waived its usual fees and raised funds through the Northshore Community Foundation to help cover a portion of the other fees involved in the process.

Montgomery said in addition to his agency, the clerks of court in St. Tammany and Washington parishes, and the sheriff's offices in St. Tammany and Washington parishes all waived their fees.

During the event, the participants - 93 men and women - met with volunteer attorneys who walked the paperwork through several stations. The DA's office, the arresting agency and the Clerk of Court's office had been provided the names of the participants in advance so they could review them.

Three 22nd Judicial District judges - William J. Burris, August J. Hand, and Reginald T. Badeaux III - volunteered their time to sign the expunge orders.

Certain crimes are not eligible for expungement - violent crimes, those involving minors, crimes involving manufacturing or selling drugs, possession of heroin, and any crime that requires a person to register as a sex offender.

Community donors included the Louisiana Bar Association, the Northshore Business Council, Church of the King, Most Holy Trinity Roman Catholic Church, Hayne Family Foundation, Buddy and Pat Hall and other individuals.

Also participating were the Justice & Accountability Center of Louisiana, Southeast Louisiana Legal Services, Louisiana United International, the NAACP of St. Tammany and the New Orleans Paralegal Association. Those groups helped screen more than 300 potential applicants, Montgomery said.

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