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President Biden Declares April as 'Second Chance Month'

Biden urges officials to provide support for formerly incarcerated individuals seeking a second chance, emphasizing his administration's efforts toward cannabis reform.

President Joe Biden has officially declared April as "Second Chance Month," continuing a tradition spanning seven years, shedding light on the societal and legal obstacles that hinder individuals with criminal records from achieving success in life. In a proclamation dated March 29 and published on April 3 in the Federal Register, Biden emphasized the need to create a criminal justice system that provides fair opportunities for people returning to their communities from incarceration, stating, "During Second Chance Month, we recommit to building a criminal justice system that lives up to those ideals so that people returning to their communities from jail or prison have a fair shot at the American Dream." He urges government officials, educators, volunteers, and all Americans to observe this month with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities.

Additionally, Biden highlights his administration's efforts toward comprehensive criminal justice reform and enhancing public safety. Notably, he mentions the administration's steps to reform cannabis policies, including the three-step plan announced in October 2022. As part of this plan, Biden requested a formal review of cannabis's scheduling under the Controlled Substances Act by Secretary of Health and Human Services Xavier Becerra and Attorney General Merrick Garland.

Biden underscores the disproportionate impact of marijuana-related incarcerations, particularly on Black and brown Americans, and the challenges faced by individuals reentering society post-incarceration. With over 650,000 people released from state and federal prisons annually, and more than 70 million Americans possessing a criminal record, obstacles such as securing employment, housing, healthcare, and education hinder their ability to rebuild their lives. Studies show that addressing these needs not only empowers formerly incarcerated individuals but also contributes to crime prevention and community safety.

The initiative for Second Chance Month originated in 2017 through Prison Fellowship, an organization dedicated to restoring those affected by crime and incarceration. Since its inception, multiple U.S. presidents and over 25 states have recognized Second Chance Month, with the participation of over 800 organizations, congregations, and businesses as official partners. Through these collaborative efforts, awareness about the challenges faced by individuals with criminal records has increased, and pathways to second chances have been unlocked for those aspiring to a better future.

The U.S. Senate unanimously passed Resolution 129 on April 25, 2017, designating April 2017 as "Second Chance Month." It was first proclaimed by a U.S. president in 2018 when then-President Donald J. Trump issued a proclamation designating April 2018 as Second Chance Month. Trump emphasized the importance of implementing evidence-based programs within federal, state, and local prison systems to equip prisoners with the skills and support needed for successful reintegration into society, including mentorship, drug addiction treatment, mental health support, and job training.

This marks the fourth consecutive year that President Biden has proclaimed April as Second Chance Month.

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