

## Governor Quinn Highlights New Public Safety Law

Written by Erin Wilson  
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### *Law Allows Counties More Flexibility to Rehabilitate Non-Violent, First-Time Offenders*

CHICAGO – September 12, 2012. Governor Pat Quinn today highlighted a new state law at the Cook County Criminal Court Building that will help local law enforcement more effectively rehabilitate non-violent, first-time offenders. The governor was joined at today's event by legislators and Cook County State's Attorney Anita Alvarez, whose office launched the successful pilot program on which this new law is based.

"To improve public safety, we need smart crime prevention strategies that put offenders on the right path," Governor Quinn said. "When we use our resources more efficiently, we can reduce crime and increase the effectiveness of our criminal justice system."

Senate Bill 3349, sponsored by Sen. Kwame Raoul (D-Chicago) and Rep. Kimberly du Buclet (D-Chicago), created the Offender Initiative Program and is based on a successful one-year pilot program launched in Cook County for first-time, non-violent offenders.

"It is clear that there are far too many cases in the criminal justice system and I think that prosecutors can play an important role in implementing new alternative sentencing measures like this that not only bring just results, but also provide non-violent offenders with a second chance," said Alvarez. "We have been extremely pleased with the results of our Deferred Prosecution Program and we are very proud that the governor and the Illinois Legislature have seen fit to use it as a model for prosecutorial-based diversion programming across the state."

With the approval of a judge and the state's attorney, an offender can be placed in a diversion program similar to probation, instead of being incarcerated. The offender would have to meet

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certain requirements, such as making restitution; performing community service or holding a job; attending educational classes to receive vocational training, a high school diploma or a GED; and if appropriate, receiving substance abuse treatment and passing drug tests.

If the offender successfully completes the intensive program, the state's attorney can request a dismissal and expungement of the original charges and the offender will be spared the enormous burden of having a felony conviction on his or her record. However, if the offender reoffends within five years, those expunged records may be used against them in court.

Since February of 2011 when the pilot program began in Cook County, a total of 645 individuals have been accepted into the program. Felony charges have been dismissed against 257 of those individuals.

According to county estimates, about \$1.1 million of taxpayer resources has been saved through this program, due to lower court and incarceration costs. The rehabilitative services offered in the program also make it less likely a person will re-offend, which reduces future costs to the criminal justice system.

SB 3349 codified this Cook County program into state law and allows state's attorneys across Illinois to create their own offender initiative programs that can be tailored to the needs of their jurisdictions. Governor Quinn signed this legislation on Aug. 27, 2012.

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