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Sept. 1 Target Date for ABA “Collateral Consequences” Campaign Launch

Written by [Chandra R. Thomas](#) on Aug 24, 2010

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Many young people are ignorant of the penalties that they could face for breaking the law. [American Bar Association \(ABA\)](#) leaders, however, think that even fewer are aware of how those same penalties could affect their lives well after they've fulfilled their debt to society.



The effects – everything from suspended voting rights and limited job opportunities to an inability to qualify for public housing or financial aid for school – are considered the collateral consequences of their actions. Well beyond the juvenile years, those repercussions may forever reverberate throughout the lives of convicted young people. In an effort to thwart them from committing crimes and to prevent those who do from accepting risky plea deals, next month the ABA is officially launching a national educational campaign.

“Most kids think if they do something they’re going to get six months probation or some time in a youth detention center but they don’t understand the consequences of their actions that aren’t directly tied to their offense,” explains Deborah Craytor, director of law

related education for the [State Bar of Georgia](#). “The purpose of this campaign is to let them know that there are consequences to their actions that they may not have ever thought of that can last the rest of their lives.”

The Collateral Consequences Project is creating a website, a nationwide resource that will spell out many of the consequences for children, based on the laws of each state. Lawyers and researchers have been gathering information for more than a year. By **Sept. 1**, just in time for the new school year, the association expects to unveil the site with state-by-state sections and printable files. The goal is to make it an online resource for parents and educators.

Along with the website and educational presentations, a key component of the project will include **“Think About It” cards**, a free wallet-size card that will be circulated to public defenders, court officers and non-profit programs to pass out to young defendants.

“This is really important for defense attorneys to have when discussing a plea deal with their young clients,” says ABA **Senior Staff Attorney and Criminal Justice Section head Christopher Gowen**. “Not only do they need to discuss the penalties with them, they also need to discuss the collateral consequences like problems down the line with getting jobs, losing their driver’s license, not being able to get into certain schools and their parents could lose their public housing.”

The State Bar of Georgia plans to take a different approach and distribute them to the more than 100,000 public school 8th graders.

“Our thought process was that, that was a little late [distributing the card only to children facing criminal charges], explains Craytor. “Under the 8th grade curriculum in Georgia they’re required to study the juvenile and Georgia’s criminal justice system. We thought this was a great to get these cards in the hands of young people.”

Kennesaw State University Conflict Management Professor Tim Hedeen is overseeing a three-year \$700,000 grant studying the collateral consequences for adult offenders nationwide. As the research director of the National Study of Collateral Consequences of Criminal Convictions Hedeen says he hopes that Georgia’s state bar will receive enough funding to provide the cards to the 8th graders and all young people already facing criminal charges.

“Unfortunately a lot of people don’t listen to warnings until they’ve already screwed up, so I think we should distribute them to both,” says Hedeen.

The State Bar of Georgia has completed the research for the cards, but it’s now in the process of seeking out funding to design and print them. The cards have already been completed in a handful of other states, including Nevada, whose Think About It card points out that a juvenile record can prevent you from...

- Getting a job
- Getting accepted to a college or graduate school
- Joining the military
- Becoming a United States citizen

The card also notes that in Nevada, the aforementioned consequences are automatic and that anyone convicted of a sex offense must register as a sex offender for the rest of their lives.

Got a story idea? Contact JJIE.org staff writer Chandra R. Thomas at cthom141@kennesaw.edu. Thomas, a former Rosalynn Carter Mental Health Journalism Fellow and Kiplinger Public Affairs Journalism Fellow, is an award-winning multimedia journalist who has worked for Atlanta Magazine and Fox 5 News in Atlanta.



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