

# How to Clear Your Criminal Record

## What is Record Clearing?

Record clearing is the term used to describe the various methods of hiding or erasing an individual’s criminal record. The terminology, eligibility, and process vary from state to state. Record clearing can include expungement, record restriction/sealing, and more.

In some circumstances, a criminal record can be completely erased from history, while in others it may only be hidden from the public but still available to law enforcement and courts.

## Benefits of Record Clearing

There are significant challenges that justice-impacted individuals face post-conviction. For those who are eligible, clearing a criminal record can remove some of the collateral consequences of conviction and improve the odds of success in many areas:

- |                             |                                      |                           |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Access to public assistance | College admissions and financial aid | Employment                |
| Housing                     | Loan eligibility                     | Privacy and peace of mind |

## Types of Record Clearing

States often use different terminology when referring to record clearing, including:

- **Expungement** – The process of completely erasing an arrest or conviction from an individual’s criminal record as if it never happened. An individual would not have to disclose the event on applications or in interviews.
- **Record Restriction/Sealing** – The process of removing a criminal record from public view, including public record searches and background checks. This information is still available to the courts and law enforcement and may be accessed through a court order.

Every state is different when it comes to record clearing eligibility, timelines, fees, and processes. The following resources can help you determine the policies in your state.

<p><b>Clean Slate Clearinghouse</b> Learn about your state’s record clearing policies: <a href="http://cleanslateclearinghouse.org">cleanslateclearinghouse.org</a></p>	<p><b>Collateral Consequences Resource Center</b> A 50-state comparison of record clearing policies: <a href="http://ccresourcecenter.org/state-restoration-profiles/50-state-comparisonjudicial-expungement-sealing-and-set-aside">ccresourcecenter.org/state-restoration-profiles/50-state-comparisonjudicial-expungement-sealing-and-set-aside</a></p>	<p><b>Legal Services Corporation</b> Find free legal services in your state to help you clear your record: <a href="http://lsc.gov/about-lsc/what-legal-aid/i-need-legal-help">lsc.gov/about-lsc/what-legal-aid/i-need-legal-help</a></p>
---	---	---

\* **Pardon** – The process of the government officially forgiving a crime. This may restore an individual’s civil rights but does not remove or hide the criminal history.

**Collateral Consequences Resource Center**

A 50-state comparison of pardon policies and practices:  
[ccresourcecenter.org/state-restoration-profiles/50-state-comparisoncharacteristics-of-pardon-authorities-2](https://ccresourcecenter.org/state-restoration-profiles/50-state-comparisoncharacteristics-of-pardon-authorities-2)