Getting a Job
with a Criminal Record



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Do you have a legal problem?
Call our hotline:

Statewide Legal Services
1-800-559-1565

Getting a job is hard, and it can be even harder if you have a criminal record. Many employers will do a background check before they hire you. To find and keep a job, you need to know your rights and what is on your criminal record. In some cases, you can truthfully answer "no" to a question about your criminal record.

This pamphlet talks about criminal records, what an employer can and can't find out about your record, tips on how to answer questions about your record, how to get something taken off your record, and more.

Can employers ask me about my criminal record?

Employers **cannot** ask you about your criminal record on the **initial** job application when you first apply, but **they can ask later in the hiring process**.

Employers **can** ask you for permission in writing to do a background check on you.

Employers **can** ask you about criminal records on an application if

- they are required to by state or federal law, or
- the position you are applying for requires a security or fidelity bond.

If the employer is a state agency, they **cannot** ask about your criminal record until **after** they have found you otherwise qualified for the position. If they decide not to hire you because you have a criminal record, they must give you a written statement explaining the reason why they denied you employment.

State employers are also required to consider:

- the relationship between the crimes on your record and the job you're applying for,
- evidence that you have changed or have been rehabilitated, and
- how much time has passed since your conviction or release from incarceration.

Are there jobs I can't get because of my record?

Yes. Your criminal record can keep you from getting certain jobs or licenses. Employers are supposed to try to hire people who can do the job – even those who have a criminal record – but they don't have to.

How does my criminal record affect my ability to get certain state licenses?

You need a license for some jobs. Your criminal record may keep you from getting certain licenses. However, a *youthful offender* record should not stop you from getting a license.

Similar to state employers, the state licensing agencies must look at:

- the kind of crimes on your record and their relationship to the license you are seeking,
- how you have changed since you were convicted, and
- the time since your conviction or release.

If the state or state agencies do not give you a license due to your criminal record, they must explain why in writing and state the evidence they used to make the decision.

If you are turned down for a license, **you have the right to appeal**. When you appeal, you can provide information about your situation and explain why your criminal record should not be used to deny you a license. There is usually a deadline for you to send in an appeal.

Do all employers run a criminal background check?

No, but many do. Most private employers have a choice, but it depends on the job. Employers will do a criminal background check for

- nurse and nurse's aide jobs;
- child daycare center, group daycare, and licensed home child care provider jobs;
- lottery, casino, horse racing, dog racing, and off-track betting jobs; and
- public school jobs.

What can an employer find out from my criminal record?

From your criminal record, employers **can** find out about

- **any convictions**, no matter when they happened, and
- non-conviction records (such as dismissed charges or arrests that did not result in a conviction) from the **last 7 years**.

Employers **cannot** find out about

- most non-conviction records (such as dismissed charges or arrests that did not result in a conviction) from **more than 7 years ago**, and
- records that have been erased, expunged, or pardoned.

Where can an employer get information on my criminal record?

Employers typically run criminal background checks through a third-party credit reporting agency (CRA).

Some common third-party background check companies are:

- Checkr
- First Advantage
- HireRight
- AccurateNow
- Sterling
- GoodHire

Employers can also look at the Connecticut Judicial Branch case look-up page (www.ctlaw.help/jud-lookup) to find publicly available records of pending charges and any convictions from the last 10 years.

Before an employer can turn you down (or take an *adverse action* against you) because of information they got from a third-party credit reporting agency, federal law requires the employer to give you notice that explains:

- that they are considering taking *adverse action* against you on because of information in the report, and
- a summary of your rights under the Fair Credit Reporting Act.

Some employers may give you an opportunity to explain your record and why it does not reflect who you are today. If the employer asks for additional information about your record or for evidence on how you have changed since your conviction, they will usually give you a deadline by which to submit it. **It is important to submit this information before the deadline so the employer can review it.** In addition to providing written explanations, you can also offer to provide letters of reference from past employers or from others who can speak highly of you.

After an employer turns you down because of information in a third-party credit report, the employer must give you a *Notice of Adverse Action*. This notice must include:

- the contact information for the credit reporting agency that the employer got the report from,
- a statement that the credit reporting agency did not make the decision to take the adverse action and is unable to provide you with the specific reasons why the adverse action was taken,
- a statement informing you of your right to dispute the accuracy or completeness of any information in the report with the agency, and
- a statement informing you of your right to get a free copy of the report from the credit reporting agency, as long as you request it within 60 days of when you received the notice.

If there are any mistakes on your report, it is important to contact the credit reporting agency to fix those mistakes.

What if I'm not hired because of my record?

If you believe you were not hired or promoted (or you were fired) because of your criminal record, ask if your record was the reason. If you are Black or Hispanic, you might have a discrimination case. You can file a complaint with:

Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO)
1-800-477-5737 www.ct.gov/chro

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
1-800-669-4000 www.eeoc.gov

You must file your complaint within 300 days. You do not need a lawyer to file.

How can I fix a mistake or get information taken off my record?

You might be able to get a Connecticut state charge or conviction removed from your record if

- your record should have been ***erased***,
- you can prove there is a ***mistake*** on your record, or
- you get a ***pardon*** (also called an *expungement*).

If an employer received your record from a third-party credit-reporting agency, you have the right to request a free copy of the report and to dispute the accuracy or completeness of the information on the report. It might be easier to correct a mistake on your criminal record than try to convince an employer that your record is wrong

To correct a mistake on your criminal record:

- ► Order a copy of your **formal criminal record** from the state police at www.CTLaw.help/crim-check.
- ► If there is an error on your **formal criminal record**, send a letter to the state police explaining what is wrong on the report and asking them to correct it. Be sure to include proof that a mistake was made. The state police must give you a written answer within 60 days. You have the right to appeal the decision.
- ► If there as an error on a **report created by a third party credit reporting agency**, you can dispute the error by sending them a copy of your formal criminal record and explaining why the information in their report is wrong.

How can I have my criminal record erased?

- ► If your record is *erased*, then it will not show up on your criminal record or a background check, and you can tell employers that you do not have a criminal record. An employer cannot find out about any charges, arrests, or convictions if they have been erased.
- ► See *How to Clear Your Criminal Record*: www.CTLaw.help/pardons

Who at my job will know about my criminal record?

Only the people who interview and make hiring decisions can see information about your record.

After you are hired, your criminal record information should not be used against you or seen by other employees.

How should I answer questions about my record during a job interview?

- ► **Prepare for your job interview** and learn the questions that are usually asked. See www.CTLaw.help/job-int and www.CTLaw.help/interview-questions.
- ► **Tell the truth.** If you lie about certain information, you might be fired for lying and you might not be able to get unemployment or cash assistance. For some jobs, lying about a criminal record is a criminal offense.
- ► **Think about how you will explain** your criminal record and the times when you didn't have a job if you are asked. You could explain why your record would not stop you from being a good employee. You might say that the event on your record happened many years ago and explain what you learned from your mistake.
- ► **Think about how you have changed** since the last event on your record. Note whether you have participated in any job training or educational or rehabilitative programs, if you have volunteered in your community, helped family members, or made any other positive changes in your life.
- ► **Think about your positives.** Highlighting good past work experience and skills that match the employer's needs can help to offset any impact your criminal record may have on your chances of getting the job.
- ► **Write down your job history.** Include the company names and addresses, your job duties, the dates you worked, and why you left.
- ► **Get references.** Try to find someone from one of your jobs who you trust and who will say good things about you. Ask what they would say about you if an employer calls and asks about you. Also ask if you may use them as a reference. You can even get a reference letter from a former employer or someone who knows you well and submit it along with your job application.

How to Get Help from Legal Aid

Contact Statewide Legal Services

www.slsct.org
1-800-453-3320 or 860-344-0380

SLS provides free advice to low-income people who have legal problems in Connecticut. For some legal problems, they may send you to another legal aid program or to a volunteer attorney.

Statewide Legal Services of CT

eviction HELP CT

Need help with a housing problem?

If you are facing eviction or losing your housing subsidy, you may have the right to a free lawyer. Call 1-800-559-1565 or go to www.EvictionHelpCT.org.

Contact your local legal aid office:

Connecticut Legal Services

www.ctlegal.org

Bridgeport
203-336-3851
1000 Lafayette Blvd.

New Britain
860-225-8678
16 Main St.

New London
860-447-0323
125 Eugene O'Neill Dr.

Stamford
203-348-9216
1177 Summer St.

Waterbury
203-756-8074
85 Central Ave.

Willimantic
860-456-1761
1125 Main St.

Greater Hartford Legal Aid

www.ghla.org
999 Asylum Ave., Hartford
860-541-5000

New Haven Legal Assistance Association

www.nhlegal.org
205 Orange St., New Haven
203-946-4811

Consumer Law Project for Elders

1-800-296-1467
Help with money and debt problems for people 60+.

Do you know your rights?
Go to **www.CTLawHelp.org** for free legal information.

For more information, go to www.CTLaw.Help/crim-record

This booklet was produced by New Haven Legal Assistance Association. The information in this booklet is based on laws in Connecticut as of 9/2025. This information is not intended as legal advice. For advice on your situation, call Statewide Legal Services or contact a lawyer.