

Clearing a PA Criminal Record

Pennsylvania records can be cleared through pardons, sealing, expungement, or vacatur.

1. **Pardon (aka Clemency):** Almost anyone with a criminal record can apply to the state Board of Pardons for clemency, but for some convictions, this is the only option available. A pardon is a long process that can take 6 or more years, and the final decision is made by the governor. There is an expedited review process for older, non-violent offenses. If a pardon is granted, the record will be expunged.
2. **Sealing (aka Limited Access):** Sealing hides a record so that it does not show up on background checks for jobs, school or housing. Sealing also provides important protections against discrimination. Those protections and the types of convictions were expanded in 2024. Most misdemeanor and many felony convictions can be sealed. Sometimes records are sealed automatically, but often sealing requires that a petition be filed, and it must be filed in the county where the prosecution occurred.
3. **Expungement:** Expungement means that a record is erased and destroyed. For people under 70 years old, only summary convictions and non-convictions can be expunged. Most of the time, an expungement requires that a petition be filed, and it must be filed in the county where the charge or conviction was filed.
4. **Vacatur:** Survivors of human trafficking are eligible to have some convictions vacated and expunged. This process was created in 2014. The survivor must demonstrate a connection between their conviction and their status as a trafficking survivor, and it requires the consent of the District Attorney. Vacating a conviction erases the criminal record and declares the survivor factually innocent of the criminal activity. Fines and costs that were already paid are refunded. Vacatur requires that a petition be filed in the county where the prosecution occurred.
5. **Expungement of Juvenile Records:** almost all juvenile records can be expunged, if all fines and costs are paid, enough time has passed without charges or convictions, and the District Attorney does not object. A petition must be filed in the county where the prosecution occurred.