

## SEALING RECORDS

When a record is **sealed** it means that people outside the criminal justice system cannot see it. The police and the courts can still see it, but for almost everyone else it is as if the charge does not exist.

Some Massachusetts criminal records can be sealed. If they are sealed, most employers and housing providers will not be able to see them when they do a CORI check. You also do not have to tell an employer or housing provider about any criminal record that has been sealed. You do not even have to say you have a sealed record. You can just say that you have no record. However, your CORI will show that you have a sealed record.

There are long waiting periods for sealing **convictions**:

--If it has been 10 years since all of your misdemeanor convictions have **closed** and 15 years since all of your felony convictions have **closed**, then your criminal record may be eligible for **sealing**. A case closes on the last day of prison, parole, or probation, whichever came last. You can apply to have convictions sealed by filling out a form and mailing it to the Office of the Commissioner of Probation, One Ashburton Place, Boston MA 02108.

For **charges you were not found guilty of**, you can apply to have them sealed at the court that handled the charges. Examples of these include charges that were nol prossed (the prosecutor decided to dismiss them), charges that were dismissed by the court without any order of probation, or charges that ended in a finding of not guilty. There is no waiting period, but you will have to show that there is a compelling governmental interest, or a good reason, to seal the record. A good reason could be that the charges are preventing you from finding employment or housing.

Many people have criminal records that they will have to live with for a long time. If you are in this situation, you should create a good file on yourself with letters from people who can explain why it is unlikely that you will commit a crime again, and that you have become a productive member of society. These letters could be from employers, probation officers, clergy, counselors, treatment people, or anyone whose opinion would be respected. You can then use these letters when you are applying for jobs.

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