

Applying for a Job with a Criminal Record in Ohio: Recommendations Informed by Research and Experience

RESUME

OBJECTIVE: Develop approval process for an administrative control computer

EDUCATION:

- UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
- College of Engineering
- Bachelor of Science in Computer Science
- Graduated in 1984, 2.85, Phi Kappa Phi
- Three years State Water Laboratory

WORK EXPERIENCE:

- 1985-1988
- State Water Laboratory
- 1988-1990
- 1990-1992
- 1992-1994
- 1994-1996
- 1996-1998
- 1998-2000
- 2000-2002
- 2002-2004
- 2004-2006
- 2006-2008
- 2008-2010
- 2010-2012
- 2012-2014
- 2014-2016
- 2016-2018
- 2018-2020
- 2020-2022

DRUG ENFORCEMENT AND POLICY CENTER

Applying for a Job with a Criminal Record in Ohio: Recommendations Informed by Research and Experience

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INTRODUCTION

Employment is a fundamental necessity. However, having a criminal record can make it difficult to secure employment. Nonetheless, securing employment with a criminal record is possible. This paper presents several recommendations to help those with criminal history secure employment. Recommendations are informed by research and experience.¹

RECOMMENDATIONS

1: If You are Eligible, Get Your Record Sealed

Ohio allows some individuals with criminal history to have their criminal records sealed, and the range of eligible individuals has expanded over the years.² While there are a few exceptions,³ employers cannot question you about sealed convictions.

2. Consider Acquiring a Certificate of Qualification for Employment

If you cannot have your record sealed/expunged, consider acquiring a Certificate of Qualification for Employment (CQE).⁴ A CQE eliminates criminal history bans for certain occupations requiring licensure, provides a judicial stamp of good character, and provides employers with negligent hiring immunity. While research has been mixed about the effectiveness of Ohio's CQE for improving hiring outcomes for those seeking general employment (i.e., jobs not requiring a specific occupational license), CQEs automatically eliminate criminal history barriers to many professions requiring occupational licenses.

3: Pursue Education or Training

Some research has shown that increased education and job training can increase employment outcomes for those with

¹ Experience insights come from an individual who has been navigating the job market with a criminal record consisting of multiple felonies and misdemeanors for approximately 15 years.

² See Ohio Revised Code Chapter 2953 for eligibility information. Available at, <https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/chapter-2953>. Also note that the Ohio Governor can order convictions to be sealed for pardoned individuals. See <https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-2967.04>.

³ For example, see <https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-2953.33>.

⁴ For information on Ohio's CQE, see <https://drc.ohio.gov/cqe>; <https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-2953.25>.

criminal history.⁵ Further, many employers require some level of education. Therefore, individuals with criminal history should consider pursuing education or training opportunities. Some online resources provide free courses or training.⁶ Other free resources connect individuals with educational or training programs focusing on high school equivalency preparation, workforce development skills, computer literacy, and college preparation.⁷

4: Pursue Behavioral Programming

Some research has found that behavioral programming such as cognitive therapy or substance abuse treatment increases employment outcomes for individuals with criminal history.⁸ Therefore, individuals with criminal history should consider pursuing behavioral programming such as cognitive therapy or substance abuse treatment.

5: Secure References and Recommendations

Some research has found improved employment outcomes when family members, friends, and or previous employers vouch for an individual with criminal history.⁹ Therefore, individuals with criminal history should seek references and recommendations from friends, employers, and other parties that could vouch for their character and potential as an employee.

6: Create a Resume

There are numerous online resources to help individuals create a resume, including those with criminal history.¹⁰ As some of those resources mention, you can still create a resume if you have little or no education, training, or experience.

7: Search for Jobs Online and in Person

Online job posting websites include indeed.com, craigslist.org, careerbuilder.com, and ziprecruiter.com. And there are many other websites. Utilizing online job posting websites will allow you to submit more resumes/applications in a shorter period of time.

However, research also shows that in-person contact with a hiring authority can increase your chances of being hired.¹¹ Therefore, if it is feasible considering your location and resources, it may be advantageous to apply for jobs in-person as well as online.

8: Keep Applying

While most research shows that criminal history has a negative impact on hiring outcomes, virtually all of these studies show that at least some employers may be willing to hire those with criminal history.¹² Therefore, while it may be discouraging to submit multiple applications with little or no response, keep applying.

⁵ See Cundiff, P. R. (2016). Erasing the mark of a criminal record: Examining the effect of education on ex-offender employment. *Corrections*, 1(2), 127–138. doi:10.1080/23774657.2016.1175327; Formon, D. L., Schmidt, A. T., & Henderson, C. (2018). Examining employment outcomes of offender and nonoffender vocational program graduates. *International journal of offender therapy and comparative criminology*, 62(9), 2781-2800.

⁶ See <https://docs.microsoft.com/en-us/learn/>; <https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/training>; https://support.google.com/answer/9259748?visit_id=637914945413901681-1281558441&hl=en&rd=1; <https://online..edu/free-courses>; <https://pll.harvard.edu/catalog/free>; <https://www.ohiohighered.org/sites/default/files/uploads/aspire/Statewide%20Virtual%20IETs%20flyer.pdf>.

⁷ See <https://www.ohiohighered.org/aspire>; <https://ohiohomeansjobs.ohio.gov/job-seekers/build-your-career/tools-for-college-students>.

⁸ See Denver, M. (2019). Criminal Records, Positive Credentials and Recidivism: Incorporating Evidence of Rehabilitation Into Criminal Background Check Employment Decisions. *Crime & Delinquency*. doi.org/10.1177/001128719833358.

⁹ See Denver, M., & Ewald, A. (2018). Credentialing decisions and criminal records: A narrative approach. *Criminology*, 56, 715-749.

¹⁰ See <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/finding-a-job/can-you-get-a-job-with-a-criminal-record>; <https://www.indeed.com/create-resume>; <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resumes-cover-letters/10-resume-writing-tips>; <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resumes-cover-letters/writing-a-resume-with-no-experience>; <https://www.monster.com/career-advice/article/resume-dilemma-no-degree>; <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resumes-cover-letters/employment-gaps-on-resume>.

¹¹ See Uggen, C., Vuolo, M., Lageson, S., Ruhland, E., & K. WHITHAM, HILAR Y. (2014). The edge of stigma: An experimental audit of the effects of low-level criminal records on employment. *Criminology*, 52(4), 627-654.

¹² See Ahmed, A. M., & Lång, E. (2017). The employability of ex-offenders: a field experiment in the Swedish labor market. *IZA journal of Labor Policy*, 6(1), 1-23.

9: Apply to Jobs that Have Ambiguous Criminal Background Check Statements in Their Job Postings

Some employers may include ambiguous language in their job postings such as “must pass a background check” or “upon successful completion of a background check.” However, research has shown that the vast majority of these employers will still consider one with criminal history.¹³ These statements generally do not mean that all of those with any form of criminal history are ineligible. Therefore, ambiguous criminal background check statements should not deter your application.

10: Do Not Lie About Your Convictions

Research has shown that some individuals with criminal history lie about their record in an effort to secure a position.¹⁴ While it is understandable that some individuals may lie about their criminal history given the importance of securing employment, the benefits of this approach often may not outweigh the negatives. For example, while you may initially secure a position by lying about your criminal history, your employer could conduct background checks at any point after you are hired, ultimately leading to termination. Further, research has shown that some of those who secure a position by lying about their criminal history consistently fear their record being discovered, and may not seek advancement given this fear.¹⁵

11: Disclose Your Criminal History Even if You are Not Asked About It and Do So Early in the Process

Some employers may not conduct background checks until after the employee is working, especially in temp-to-hire positions. Research has shown that some individuals with criminal history that were initially hired and working, were later terminated because of a subsequent background check.¹⁶ Therefore, disclose your criminal history even if you are not asked about it to avoid spending the time and effort to secure a position that may ultimately result in termination. And again, disclosing your criminal history early in the process means that you will not have to constantly worry about an issue arising at a later time.

Research has also shown that being upfront and honest about your criminal history can improve your chances of being hired.¹⁷ One way to do so is to submit a cover letter along with your resume/application. In your cover letter, state that you want to be upfront and honest, disclose your criminal history, and then list any positive things you have done since your convictions.¹⁸ See the following for an example:

Hello,

I am reaching out today because I saw your position posting and feel that I would be a great fit. I earned my high school equivalency certificate in 2011 and have accumulated a good range of work experience and skills. For example, I have worked in restaurant, stock/general labor, and office/customer service positions. Further, I am very adaptable and can quickly learn new procedures, programs, and equipment. I do want to be totally honest that I possess a criminal record. However, since those convictions, I have [LIST POSITIVE THINGS SINCE CONVICTIONS], so I am definitely eager to get back to work and keep things on a positive track.

In conclusion, I am very excited about your posting and I really believe that I would make a great addition to your company. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

[Your Name Here]

¹³ See Leasure, P., Carver, M., Olsen, B., Bryner, H., Foster, S., Jara-Siza, J. K., Burns, E., & Ottey, J. (2022). “Must Pass a Criminal Background Check”: Interpretations and Impacts of Ambiguous Criminal Background Check Statements.

¹⁴ See Augustine, D. (2019). Working around the law: Navigating legal barriers to employment during reentry. *Law & Social Inquiry*, 44(3), 726-751.

¹⁵ See Augustine, D. (2019). Working around the law: Navigating legal barriers to employment during reentry. *Law & Social Inquiry*, 44(3), 726-751.

¹⁶ See Augustine, D. (2019). Working around the law: Navigating legal barriers to employment during reentry. *Law & Social Inquiry*, 44(3), 726-751.

¹⁷ See Leasure, P., Carver, M., Olsen, B., Bryner, H., Foster, S., Jara-Siza, J. K., Burns, E., & Ottey, J. (2022). “Must Pass a Criminal Background Check”: Interpretations and Impacts of Ambiguous Criminal Background Check Statements.

¹⁸ See Ali, A. A., Lyons, B. J., & Ryan, A. M. (2017). Managing a perilous stigma: Ex-offenders’ use of reparative impression management tactics in hiring contexts. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 102(9), 1271 for additional information on how to frame your criminal history.

12: Utilize Online and Community Resources

Various online and community resources have been created to help those looking for work to secure a position. For example, some online resources present detailed job-hunting tips/strategies that include being mindful of your online presence (i.e., how you display yourself in social media), pursuing volunteer work or internships, learning job keywords to put in your resume, and simply reaching out to companies to introduce yourself and see if they may be hiring.¹⁹ Other more comprehensive online and community resources can help individuals explore different careers, find training or education for those careers, build their resumes/cover letters, and find jobs.²⁰ Some of these comprehensive resources are specifically focused on helping individuals with criminal history secure employment.²¹

¹⁹ See <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/finding-a-job/job-hunting>.

²⁰ See <https://www.careeronestop.org/>; <https://ohiomeansjobs.ohio.gov/home>.

²¹ See <https://www.careeronestop.org/ExOffender/default.aspx>; <https://ohiomeansjobs.ohio.gov/job-seekers/build-your-career/for-restored-citizens>.