

Quick Facts: Criminal Records in Pennsylvania

- An estimated 77 million – nearly one in three – American adults have criminal records, meaning that they have been arrested and charged with a crime at least one time. Criminal records are permanent in Pennsylvania unless they are expunged, or erased, by court order.
- On average, over 225,000 criminal cases are initiated in Pennsylvania every year.
- An estimated 20% of all Philadelphians have a criminal record. In low income, high arrest, heavily minority communities, the estimate approaches 60 percent. That suggests there are over 240,000 low-income Philadelphians with criminal records.
- Nationwide, a past conviction history raises over 40,000 barriers to employment, education, housing, loan borrowing, professional licensing, and voting. Among numerous other post-sentence punishments. In Pennsylvania, convictions restrict access to over 100 occupations.
- Criminal records are available publicly on the internet via the UJS Portal. Despite Ban the Box laws, an estimated 87% of employers and 80% of landlords check criminal records.
- Pennsylvania has the fifth largest prison population in the United States, and the third largest population of people on supervision – both probation and parole.
- An average of 25,000 people return to Philadelphia each and every year from local, state, and federal jails and prisons. Ninety-one percent of those released from state prisons to Philadelphia are released to neighborhoods in poverty.
- As reported by the CEOs of the Workforce Development Boards for Allegheny and Philadelphia Counties, “From our perspective, it is undeniable that criminal records are a major factor in keeping people in poverty.”
- The only way to have a conviction erased from a criminal record in Pennsylvania (with the exception of summary offenses) is through a pardon from the Governor. The only way to receive this pardon is by getting a recommendation from the statewide Board of Pardons. From the date that an application is filed, it currently takes of over 3 years to get a hearing before the Board of Pardons.

2017 Board of Pardons Data (as of 4/26/2019)

- Clemency Applications Issued: 3,422
- Clemency Applications Received: 561
 - Cases Merit Reviewed: 345
 - Public Hearings Held: 197
- Pardons Recommended: 166
 - Pardons Denied: 26