

Expunging Court Records

What Does It Mean When the Court Expunges a Record?

Expunging a court record means the court will seal the entire criminal case file, both paper and electronic, and not allow anyone to access the file unless they have a court order.

If the judge orders a case expunged, any reference to it will be removed from the Wisconsin Circuit Court Access website (WCCA). If someone were to ask the court about the case, they would be told that no information for that case exists.

I Would Like My Criminal Record Expunged. How Can I Do That?

The court can expunge criminal records in only two circumstances:

1) For misdemeanors committed by a person under age 21 where a sentence has been successfully completed (Wisconsin Statute § 973.015). At sentencing, the court will order that the record be expunged when the defendant successfully completes their sentence.

2) In juvenile cases when the juvenile reaches age 17 and has satisfactorily complied with the conditions of the dispositional order (Wis. Stat. § 938.355(4m)). Upon reaching age 17, the person must petition the court to expunge the record.

Other than these two situations, a judge has no other authority or power to expunge cases. There is no authority to expunge other types of cases, for example civil or small claims cases.

My Record Was Supposed To Be Expunged But It Is Still On the WCCA website. Why?

For misdemeanor convictions committed by a person under age 21, the case is only expunged when the

sentence has been successfully completed and the detaining or probationary authority has submitted a certificate of discharge. The detaining or probationary authority is the agency that supervised you during your sentence, usually the probation office.

Check with the clerk of court in the county where you were convicted to see if a certificate of discharge was ever filed. If no certificate was filed with the court, you will have to contact the detaining or probationary authority to determine whether they can issue that certificate.

Juvenile adjudications cannot be viewed on the WCCA website, but the record can still be accessed by a variety of agencies. In order to have your juvenile record expunged you must petition the court.

In deciding whether to expunge your juvenile case the court will determine whether you satisfactorily complied with the conditions of your dispositional order. The court will also consider whether you would benefit from expunction and whether society will not be harmed by the expunction.

My Record Was Expunged. Does That Mean That No One Will Find Out About My Case?

No. A judge can only order expunction of the circuit court's record of your case, not the records of other agencies.

The Crime Information Bureau (CIB), which is part of the Wisconsin Department of Justice, operates the Wisconsin Criminal History Repository. The Wisconsin Criminal History Repository maintains a record of all convictions regardless of whether the court expunged your record. Anyone can make a request for information from the Wisconsin Criminal History Repository and employers often run background checks of job applicants this way.

Additionally, the case may still exist in district attorney records, law enforcement records, and the department of transportation or other agency records. The judge has no authority to require removal of those agency records.

Even if the circuit court expunged your court record, anyone who asks for information from another agency may be able to obtain information about your conviction.

My Record Was Expunged. Do I Still Have To Admit I Was Convicted Of A Crime?

Yes. Although your record was expunged and your court record sealed, the judge's order does NOT reverse or set aside your conviction.

If you are asked if you have ever been convicted of a crime, such as on a job application, you must answer "Yes." But, if asked that question you can also explain that your record was expunged and explain the circumstances of your case and why it was expunged.

The Charges Against Me Were Dismissed. Can I Still Get My Record Expunged?

No. If your case was dismissed you do not qualify to have your case expunged. In order to qualify for expunction you must have been convicted in criminal court or adjudicated delinquent in juvenile court. If your case was dismissed or if you were charged with a crime and found not guilty, you were not convicted.

In this situation, you may be able to have certain information removed from the Wisconsin Criminal History Repository. Contact the CIB to get a special form for this request.

CIB removing information from the Wisconsin Criminal History Repository does not remove information from district attorney records, law enforcement records, and the department of transportation or other agency records.

I Was Arrested But Never Charged. Can The Court Expunge That Information?

Because you were never charged with a crime the circuit court does not have a criminal case file. But you may be

able to have certain information removed from the Wisconsin Criminal History Repository by submitting a special form to the CIB.

CIB removing information from the Wisconsin Criminal History Repository does not remove information from district attorney records, law enforcement records, and the department of transportation or other agency records.

How Do I Find More Information About The CIB and The Wisconsin Criminal History Repository?

Visit the Wisconsin Department of Justice website at www.doj.state.wi.us/ and read the information under the “Background Checks” section. There you will find several helpful brochures such as “Questions About Criminal Records”, and “Remove Arrest Information.”

Is A Governor’s Pardon The Same Thing As Getting My Case Expunged?

No. A governor’s pardon does not expunge your court record. If you receive a governor’s pardon the court will add a notation to your court record indicating that a pardon was granted for that case.

Your record will not be sealed and the file will still be accessible both at the clerk of courts office and on the WCCA website. A pardon will also not remove your record from the Wisconsin Criminal History Repository. More information about pardons can be found on the Department of Corrections website at: www.wi-doc.com/

Additional helpful information can be found at:

Wisconsin Circuit Court Access Website:
wcca.wicourts.gov/

Wisconsin Court System
www.wicourts.gov

Wisconsin Department of Justice: www.doj.state.wi.us/

Wisconsin State Bar
www.wisbar.org

Department of Workforce Development Publication:
“Fact Sheet - Arrest and Conviction Records under the Law” -
www.dwd.state.wi.us/dwd/publications/erd/pdf/ERD-7609-P.pdf

Wisconsin Statutes – Revisor of Statutes Bureau:
www.legis.state.wi.us/rsb/

Expunging Court Records:

Helpful Information and Frequently Asked Questions

*Requests for copies of this brochure can be directed to:
Director of State Courts Office
Office of Court Operations
110 East Main, Suite 410
Madison, WI 53703*

October 2007