

## **STEP-BY-STEP COMMON PLEAS COURT EXPUNGEMENT GUIDELINES:**

- 1. Begin by completing an Expungement Application form which is available:**
  - In person from the Clerk of Courts office located in the Hamilton County Courthouse, 1000 Main Street, Room 315, Cincinnati, Ohio 45202.
  - Via mail by calling the Expungement Department at (513) 946-5697.
  - Or you may download the form here:

**Expungement Application:** <http://www.courtclerk.org/forms/expungement.pdf>

- 2. Fee:** If you are requesting the expungement of a non-conviction, no fee is required and you should proceed to step 3. Otherwise, you must pay a \$50.00 non-refundable fee to the Clerk of Courts located in the Hamilton County Courthouse, 1000 Main Street, Room 315, Cincinnati, Ohio 45202. The telephone number is (513) 946-5697. However, if you indicate to the clerk that you cannot afford the \$50.00 fee, an Affidavit of Indigency form will be given to you for completion or you may download the form here:

**Affidavit of Indigency:** <http://www.courtclerk.org/forms/indigency.pdf>

- 3. If your request for expungement is granted and you have filed an Affidavit of Indigency, but the judge finds you are NOT indigent, sealing of your record will not take place until the \$50.00 fee is paid. If your request for expungement is granted and the judge finds you are indigent, the record will be sealed without payment of a fee.**

- 4. The Application to Expunge will be set for consideration by the judge before whom you originally appeared. The expungement request is usually scheduled for hearing in about four (4) to six (6) weeks. You will receive a postcard from the Hamilton County Assignment Commissioner's office informing you where and when to appear. Pending the hearing, your application is checked by the Probation Department for initial eligibility. Be sure to respond promptly to any request for information from the Probation Department. The Probation Department reports its findings to the judge for consideration at the expungement hearing. If you do not respond to the Probation Department, it is likely the department will report that you do not qualify for expungement.**

- 5. If you are unable to appear for your scheduled hearing and you are being represented by counsel, contact your attorney as soon as possible. If you are filing pro se (representing yourself without an attorney), contact the courtroom directly to reschedule your hearing. You may access the Common Pleas courtroom numbers here: (add hot button to Court of Common Pleas Judges). Or you may contact the Assignment Commissioner's office at (513) 946-5930.**

- 6. If your request for expungement is granted, you MUST return the SIGNED Entry to the Expungement Department in the Clerk of Courts' office in room 315 of the Courthouse. IF THE ENTRY IS NOT RETURNED, YOUR CASE CANNOT BE EXPUNGED.**



# THE SUPREME COURT of OHIO

OFFICE OF JUDICIAL SERVICES

## COURT-ORDERED SEALING OF CRIMINAL RECORD WITH CONSIDERATION OF INDIGENCY

Sealing of a criminal record is governed by [R.C. 2953.31](#) et seq.

### Eligible Offender - Two Ways to Define

An eligible offender is statutorily defined by [R.C. 2953.31\(A\)\(1\)\(a\)](#) as anyone who has been convicted of one or more offenses, but not more than five felonies:<sup>1</sup>

- a) In Ohio or any other jurisdiction; and
- b) None of the felony convictions are greater than F4 or F5 or offenses of violence<sup>2</sup> or felony sex offenses.<sup>3</sup>

An eligible offender is defined statutorily by [R.C. 2953.31\(A\)\(1\)\(b\)](#) as anyone who has been convicted of an offense in this state or any other jurisdiction, to whom division [\(A\)\(1\)\(a\)](#) does not apply and who has:

1. One felony conviction; or
2. Two misdemeanor convictions; or
3. One felony conviction and one misdemeanor conviction.

[R.C. 2953.31\(A\)\(1\)\(b\)](#) further provides for merger of convictions for purposes of sealing the record if:

1. Two or more convictions result from or are connected with the same act or result from offenses committed at the same time; or,
2. Two or three convictions result from the same indictment, information, or complaint, from the same plea of guilty, or from the same official proceeding, and result from related criminal acts that were committed within a three-month period, but do not result from the same act or from offenses committed at the same time, unless the court determines that it is not in the public interest for the two or three convictions to be counted as one conviction in accordance with [R.C. 2953.32\(C\)\(1\)\(a\)](#).

NOTE: [R.C. 2953.36](#) lists convictions that would preclude an individual from being an eligible offender. Those exceptions should be reviewed before determining an individual's eligibility for sealing. If a conviction of an offense is not sealable at the time of conviction, but the offense is later changed so that the penalty for the classification of the offense is changed, then the conviction is eligible for sealing.

### Final Discharge<sup>4</sup>

[R.C. 2953.32](#) sets out the required time period for application after final discharge:

1. Five years for 3, 4, or 5 felony convictions;
2. Four years for 2 felony convictions;
3. Three years for 1 felony conviction;
4. One year for misdemeanor convictions.

If there are unpaid, but collectable fines or restitution, it is deemed that there is no final discharge. Correspondingly, if community

service was ordered, but not completed, there is no final discharge.<sup>5</sup> If there are unpaid court costs, that is not a bar to final discharge.<sup>6</sup> A trial court may seal the record in a case dismissed pursuant to [R.C. 2953.52](#), even if the statute of limitations has not expired. *State v. Dye*, 152 Ohio St.3d 11 2017-Ohio-7823.

[R.C. 2953.32\(C\)](#) provides the considerations of a court for sealing the record of conviction or bail forfeiture.

1. The court shall do each of the following:
  - a) Determine if the offender is an eligible offender as set forth in [R.C. 2953.31\(A\)](#);

The staff of the Supreme Court of Ohio would like to thank the Hon. Patrick Carroll, Judge of the Lakewood Municipal Court, who contributed to the development of this bench card.

- b) Determine whether criminal proceedings are pending against the applicant;
- c) Determine whether the applicant has been rehabilitated to the satisfaction of the court;
- d) If the prosecutor has filed an objection, consider the reasons against granting the application specified by the prosecutor in the objection;
- (e) Weigh the interests of the applicant in having the records pertaining to the applicant's

conviction or bail forfeiture sealed against the legitimate needs, if any, of the government to maintain those records.

### Fee and Waiver of Fee

R.C. 2953.32(C)(3). Upon the filing of an application to seal the record, the applicant, unless indigent,<sup>6</sup> shall pay a fee of fifty dollars (\$50.00), regardless of the number of records the application requests to have sealed.

R.C. 2953.52. Sealing of records after not-guilty finding, dismissal of proceedings, or no bill by grand jury. This section does not require a filing fee.<sup>7</sup>

### Proposed Form of Entry upon Application to Seal Record Accompanied by Affidavit of Indigency

This case is before the court on the movant's motion for waiver of filing fees on the basis of an assertion of indigency.

Upon review of the record and in accordance with R.C. 2953.32(C)(3), the court finds that payment of filing fees are conditionally waived and the movant is entitled to proceed at this time without a deposit for court cost and filing fees. The clerk of court shall process the motion to seal the record and proceed with this case as if the appropriate fees had been paid.

At any stage of the proceedings the court reserves the right to question the movant on the claim of lack of financial ability to pay the filing fees. Based upon a later determination, the court may order the fees to be assessed or paid. If the judge or magistrate finds that the movant is able to pay the filing fees and other court costs, then such fees and court cost will be assessed against the movant and may be ordered to be paid prior to proceeding with the case. Failure of the movant to comply with the order to pay any such fees or costs may result in dismissal of the proceeding.

1 Based upon LSC analysis, there is no stated numerical limit on the number of misdemeanors that may be sealed.

2 R.C. 2901.01(A)(9) defines offenses of violence.

3 R.C. 2967.28(A)(3) defines a felony sex offense to include any conviction of an offense contained in R.C. 2907.

4 The term "final discharge" is not defined by statute. In *State v. Hoover*, Nos. 12-AP-818 & 826, 10th. Dist. 2013-Ohio-3337, the court stated that an offender is not finally discharged until he has served any sentence imposed by the court. This definition was cited and approved by the court in *State v. Aguirre*, 144 Ohio St 3d 179, 2014-Ohio-4603. Final discharge generally occurs when community control supervision expires or at the time all other sanctions imposed from a criminal conviction have been completed. Failure to pay a financial sanction imposed in a criminal case delays final discharge, even though community control supervision has expired. *State v. Aguirre*.

*State v. Paige*, No. 15AP-510, 10th. Dist. 2015-Ohio-4876. Defendant was not an eligible offender who was permitted to seal record of conviction when there were unpaid fines. *State v. T.M.*, No. 101194, 8th. Dist. 2014-Ohio-5688. The trial court waived the suspended fines 22 years after felony conviction and granted the defendant's application to seal the record of conviction. Although the court of appeals reversed on the grounds that the trial court did not have the authority to waive the fines based upon the applicable law in effect at the time, the appellate court further noted

that even if the fines had been properly waived, final discharge would have occurred at the time of fine waiver and the defendant would be required to wait three years to seal the record of conviction.

*State v. Braun*, No. 46082, 8th. Dist. (1983). Final discharge includes payment of fines, not just completion of jail sentence when probation was not imposed.

5 *State v. Gainey*, No. 14AP-583, 10th. Dist. 2015-Ohio-3119. No final discharge to seal record of conviction when the defendant failed to complete community service that was imposed as part of the sentence.

6 *State v. Ushery*, No. C-120515, 1st. Dist. 2013-Ohio-2509. Reversal of denial of sealing of record for unpaid court costs. The appellate court held that court costs were civil in nature and not part of punishment, as compared to fines or other financial sanctions. As such, unpaid court costs were not grounds, by themselves, to deny motion to seal record of conviction. *State v. Summers*, 71 Ohio App.3d. 1, 8th. Dist. (1990). Court costs are civil in nature and not part of a criminal sentence and, therefore, cannot be grounds for denying motion to seal record of conviction.

7. *State v. Hilliard*, Union County Common Pleas Court, No. 04CR 85, 2012 Ohio Misc. Lexis No. 3704 (2012) & *State v. Miller*, Union County Common Pleas Court, No. 05CR56, 2012 Ohio Misc. Lexis No. 3720 (2012). If a court requires a local fee for the sealing of a record after dismissal, R.C. 2323.30 and 2323.31 provide a basis for the waiver of this fee upon an affidavit of indigency.