



# Cuyahoga County, Legal Aid Society of Cleveland, to help low-level offenders get records sealed



By [Stan Donaldson, The Plain Dealer](#)

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People who have been convicted of low-level felonies and misdemeanors can get help beginning today to get their records sealed.

More than a dozen attorneys from the Cuyahoga County Prosecutor's Office, county Office of Reentry, Legal Aid Society of Cleveland and volunteer counsel will hold a clinic at Shaker Heights Municipal Court to help participants with the paperwork they need to file to begin the process, said Fred Bolotin, a staff attorney with the County Office of Reentry who helped organize the clinic. The process could take several weeks to complete.

The clinic, from 4 to 7 p.m., will be the first of several the groups plan to hold at municipal courts throughout the county next year. Bolotin said he believes the clinics will impact around 10,000 residents.

"People need to be held accountable for their actions, but a for a relatively minor offense the penalty should not be lifelong," Bolotin said. "That offense should not dog them and keep them from getting employment. It does not help anyone in society."

The clinic is being held in response to a recently passed state law that eases collateral sanctions against



Shaker Heights Municipal Court

### Sealing court records

**What:** A clinic to help those convicted of low level offenses seal their court records.

**When:** Today from 4 to 7 p.m.

**Where:** Shaker Heights Municipal Court, 3355 Lee Road.

**What to bring:** Participants should bring proper identification and documentation about their arrest or conviction.

**More information or to register:** Register [online](#) or via [email](#) or call (216) 443-7216.

people with minor records for offenses such as shoplifting or vandalism.

This summer, Gov. John Kasich signed Senate Bill 337 into law. It allows ex-offenders to seal one felony conviction and one misdemeanor conviction, or two misdemeanor convictions. The previous law only allowed for one conviction to be sealed.

The new law also allows ex-offenders to gain occupational licenses and earn driver's licenses. The bill was drafted by State Sens. Shirley Smith, a Democrat from Cleveland, and Bill Seitz, a Republican from Cincinnati.

Smith said even though the law has passed there are still people who don't have information about how to get their criminal records sealed. She said the new law will impact thousands of residents in Cuyahoga County.

"A lot of people don't know about the process," Smith said. "I think the clinic is a wonderful thing because it helps to keep people informed."

Though a person's criminal record won't be wiped away entirely, sealing a criminal record can keep employers and landlords who conduct background checks from knowing details about an offender's past that could hinder their progress in finding work or housing.

The clinic is also available to people who may have been arrested and not charged, acquitted or found not guilty, who may also want information about their cases sealed.

The law does not apply to people who have been convicted of crimes in the last few years, or those convicted of violent crimes, domestic violence, sexual offenses or those who have been convicted of driving under the influence.

Bolotin said the county expects to hold the clinic at other municipal courts in the county in 2013. People who plan to attend should bring their identifications, information about cases or any related paperwork, he said.

Colleen Cotter, executive director of the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland, said the group trained about 200 Northeast Ohio attorneys at an event in October in how to seal records for ex-offenders. About a dozen attorneys from her office will volunteer at the clinic.

Cotter said Legal Aid has held a few similar clinics of its own, and plans to be involved as the new law begins to impact the public.

"This is really for people who are looking for a fresh start," Cotter said. "We are trying to play a role in helping those people get a second chance."

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