

Nine Things You Should Know About Applying for a Pardon

- 1. Trying for a pardon is worthwhile.** It takes a lot of effort and time waiting to get a pardon, but your time and effort can be worth it. If you succeed you will no longer have your criminal record to stand in the way of getting a job, an apartment, and other things that you need.
- 2. Do not file too soon.** The Board of Pardons usually will not recommend a pardon until *at least five years* have passed from the end of your sentence, more if the crime was serious or if someone was hurt. The longer you wait, the more likely you will get a pardon, because you will have a longer period of time to show you have changed; are not the same person who committed the crime.
- 3. Be patient.** It can take several years, from the time you file your application, until the Board of Pardons grants a hearing, and until the Governor signs your pardon.
- 4. Be thorough.** To have a chance, you must follow the instructions perfectly. Obtain all of the requested information. Secure the correctly sized photo and the correct version of your State Police report criminal record. Answer every question on the application for pardon in detail and leave no blank responses to any questions. *If your application is denied you must wait at least a year to file a second application.*
- 5. Take responsibility for your crime.** If the Board of Pardons believes you are not taking full responsibility for your crime, you will not get recommended for a pardon.
- 6. Make your case.** When you are completing the pardon application, do not just write a few lines to answer the questions. Provide lots of details, describing how the crime occurred; why you need a pardon (listing all of the jobs you lost because of your record); and the evidence of your reform (discuss your good life since your crime, volunteer activities, church activities, raising your children, your jobs,). And remember – take responsibility for the crime! You can add extra pages to the application, and you can add other papers that are not asked for in the instructions (like job training certificates, newspaper articles about you, and letters of recommendation).
- 7. Get supporters.** Have people who will stand up for you write letters of support to include with your application. Examples might include a teacher, member of the clergy, a block captain, or even a parent. If you are granted a hearing, it is good to bring one or more supporters to the hearing, if you can. Your supporters do not need to speak at the hearing on your behalf, but be certain to introduce them when you speak.
- 8. Get advice.** It is good to have the draft of your pardon application reviewed by someone who knows about the pardon process. Help is available through the X-Offenders for Community Empowerment which holds periodic “Pardon Me” Clinics in West, South and Northeast Philadelphia. *For dates, times and locations of the Pardon Me Clinics call 215-668-8477 or go to www.ex-offenders.org.*
- 9. Be consistent.** The Board will look very carefully at your application and compares it to your statements at your hearing and other written statements you have made. Be sure to refresh your memory by looking at your application before your hearing.

This flier was prepared for informational purposes only by
Legal Aid of Southeastern Pennsylvania
which maintains an Advice & Referral Helpline
1-877-429-5994 (toll free)
the Helpline is open Monday thru Friday 9:00 am – 1:00 pm

PARDON CHECKLIST

Send a letter to the Board of Pardons, 333 Market Street, 15th Floor, Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333, (717) 787-2596, **for an Application for Clemency**. Include a money order for \$8.00 (payable to Commonwealth of Pennsylvania) and a pre-addressed return business size envelope with \$1.30 postage on it.

Order from the Pennsylvania State Police a criminal background record check called an “ACCESS and REVIEW”. This report costs \$10.00 and cannot be requested on-line. You obtain an ACCESS and REVIEW background check by submitting a Criminal History Request Form – SP164 (which can be downloaded from the State Police website) with a \$10.00 money order made payable to Commonwealth of Pennsylvania along with a copy of a valid government issued ID containing your current address to:
Pennsylvania State Police, Central Repository – 164, 1800 Elmerton Avenue, Harrisburg, PA 17110-9758.

Secure from PennDOT a copy of your “Certified Driving Record”. Your Certified Driving Record will need to be attached to your application for pardon even if you have never had a driver’s license in Pennsylvania. To obtain a copy of your Certified Driving Record you will need to complete and send a “Request for Driver Information Form” (which can be downloaded from the PennDOT website) with a \$30.00 money order made payable to Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to:
Bureau of Driver Licensing, Driver Record Services, PO Box 68695, Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333.

Contact the Clerk of Courts at the Courthouse in the county where you were convicted and obtain from the Clerk’s office: 1) copy of the Criminal Information/Indictment Sheet; 2) copy of the final plea or verdict; 3) copy of the disposition/sentencing order; and 4) proof all assessed fines, costs and restitution have been paid in full. *If you have any outstanding fines or costs, no matter how small or the reason for their non-payment, the Board of Pardons will not consider your application.* If the Clerk of Court cannot locate any of these documents, ask for a letter explaining why this information could not be provided.

Obtain one 2” by 2” (passport size) color photo of yourself. This photo should be a “headshot” of you; not a photo of you and your dog/cat or you and your family. Smile for your photo, but do not strike any pose which would suggest you are not taking your application for a pardon seriously.

Complete a sample application first. When you receive your application for pardon make a copy of the official application and practice writing out your answers to the questions on the copy before you write your final responses on the official form and return the completed application to the Board of Pardons with your \$25.00 money order made payable to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS

- ***Tell your children about your crime and jail time.*** The Board of Pardons routinely asks applicants, “have you told your children about what you did?”
- ***Keep track of your good deeds.*** The Board of Pardons wants proof of your “rehabilitation.” The application asks, “How have you contributed to the community and what efforts have you made to rehabilitate and improve your-self?”
If you are not currently involved in community service activities or active in a community service organization start volunteering now. If you are religious you may want to become more involved with your church, synagogue or mosque.
- ***Keep a record of your successes.*** If you complete a job training program or attend classes; be certain to keep every certificate you are given
- ***Letter of References.*** Although it is too early to ask someone to write a letter of recommendation for you, begin thinking about people who might be able to write a letter to the Board of Pardons supporting you and your application and who can tell the Board, “how much you have changed” since your conviction.