

WESTCHESTER CONNECTIONS

Reentry Resources That Can Turn Your Life Around

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Rights

Be familiar with the actions you can take to address obstacles to exercising your rights when you return to the community, for example, rights related to employment (see information on RAP sheets), housing, jury service, licensure, and voting.

The [Restoration of Rights Project \(nacdl.org\)](https://nacdl.org) provides detailed information on rights lost due to incarceration and actions to regain them across the county. Use their interactive map to locate NYS to view their latest report. Information on sealing and expungement is included in the information on RAP Sheets.

The “Legal” section (p166-179) of the [New York Public Library’s 2023 Connections Guide \(nypl.org/help/community-outreach/correctional-services\)](https://nypl.org/help/community-outreach/correctional-services) summarizes rights related to: Police Interactions, Protest Safety, Digital Policing & Surveillance. Worth a read!

– Review Your RAP Sheet (Record of Arrests and Prosecutions)

Studies indicate that as many as 30% of NYS RAP sheets have at least one error. Fixing these errors—and fully understanding what is on the corrected criminal record can help open doors to employment, housing, and more.

The [Legal Action Center \(LAC\)](#) offers a series of short videos that explains how to obtain a copy of your record, discusses what appears on the background checks run by many employers, reviews laws protecting job seekers and workers from discrimination, and ways to lower barriers to employment, occupational licenses, and housing. [The video series is linked here.](#) This includes information on what can be sealed/suppressed and removed/expunged. LAC can also answer questions as you work to correct your RAP sheet; they can be reached at 212-243-1313.

[NYCourts.gov](https://nycourts.gov) provides information under [Criminal Record Basics](#) that directs you in working with the NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) to correct RAP sheets. As explained in LAC's videos (above), there is a lot to know here, especially about what can and cannot be suppressed (visible only to certain types of organizations) or expunged (removed) from your record. This is all especially important given recent changes in drug laws in NYS.

For in-person education and assistance, the [Community Service Society's Next Door Project](#) provides monthly workshops to explain RAP sheets and help you to obtain, review and correct them. They also do on-site fingerprinting. Workshops take place at their offices in Manhattan (633 3rd Avenue, 10th FL, Rooms 1 & A2) at 9:30am. The 2023 dates are: **Mar 23, May 25, Jul 27, Sep 28, Nov 30, Dec 29**. To schedule your attendance call 212-614-5441. ID and mask are required.

If you are in the community in New York State, you can obtain a copy of your record by making an appointment with [IdentoGo](#) (877-472-6915). This service collects a digital fingerprint scan and submits that to the DCJS Record Review Unit. You would request either a suppressed (does not include sealed or suppressed information; this is the version most employers would see) or unsuppressed version. There is a \$13.50 fee (which can be waived), and a waiting period of 3-4 weeks for a response by mail. Review the complete application information at this [DCJS page](#) listed under "Requesting Your Criminal History While Living in NY State."

*Note: While you are incarcerated you can write directly to the DCJS Record Review Unit for a – free – copy of your RAP sheet (they already have your fingerprints on file). Use this form or write a letter including the indicated information and send it to the listed address. *They will not send one if you will be incarcerated for less than 45 days.* You will receive an unsuppressed version of your RAP sheet; this is NOT something you would provide to a potential employer.*

[Community Service Society \(CSS\) Next Door Project](#)
cssny.org/programs/entry/the-next-door-project 633
 3rd Avenue, 10th FL, Rooms 1 &
 A2, New [Read More]

[Legal Action Center \(LAC\)](#)
 212-243-1313 225 Varick St, 4th
 Floor, New York, NY 10014 [Read
 More]

– Obtain Certificates of Relief and Good Conduct

These certificates help New Yorkers with criminal records reduce barriers to employment, licenses, housing, and serving on a jury. Some rights are restored over time, such as your right to obtain a professional or trade license and to serve in a public office.

[Certificate of Relief](#) and [Certificate of Good Conduct](#) are issued by the [NYS Division of Parole](#). Note that the number of felony convictions on your record determines which certificate you are eligible for. To understand your eligibility, you should first get an official copy of your RAP sheet to understand exactly what's on your arrest and conviction record before applying for a certificate.

The [Legal Action Center \(LAC\)](#) offers clear guides on this topic – [Lowering Conviction Record Barriers](#) (June 2022) and [How to Gather Evidence of Rehabilitation](#) – that covers the importance of obtaining the certificates and how to get it done. They may also be able to provide assistance in obtaining the certificates and your New York State RAP sheet. Contact them at 212-243-1313 for more information.

LAC also produced this 2020 guide on [Getting to Work with a Criminal Record: New York State License Guides](#) to "dispel the myths and misinformation that may discourage people with convictions from pursuing employment and career pathways that are actually available to them."

Locally, the **Legal Aid Society of Westchester (LASW)** will interview clients interested in seeking a certificate of relief from civil disabilities. This applies to both clients we represented on the convictions as well as people they did not represent. Call their office for an appointment at 914-286-3400.

Legal Action Center (LAC)

212-243-1313 225 Varick St, 4th
Floor, New York, NY 10014 lac.org
LAC provides education and
[Read More]

Legal Aid Society of Westchester (LASW)

914-286-3400 info@laswest.org
laswest.org The Legal Aid Society
of Westchester County provides
free criminal and family [Read
More]

– Sealing and Expungement (basic definitions from DCJS)

Sealing means that all of the arrest, court and prosecution records related to certain convictions are confidential and cannot be seen except under the following circumstances as required by state law:

- If an individual is applying for a job as a police or peace officer; and,
- If an individual is applying for a pistol permit.

Marijuana Convictions

State law requires the sealing of convictions for the following offenses that occurred prior to March 31, 2021: unlawful possession of marijuana; third-, fourth-, and fifth-degree criminal possession of marijuana; and fourth- and fifth-degree criminal sale of marijuana.

In addition, state law allows individuals convicted of unlawful possession of marijuana and fifth-degree criminal possession of marijuana to seek destruction of those conviction records. A formal request to destroy those records must be made through the state Office of Court Administration (OCA). Please visit the [OCA website](#) for more information about that process. ***Also see the rest of the information available on this page!***

Note: *If you are satisfied with the confidentiality that record sealing already provides, you are not required to apply for expungement or destruction of conviction records.*

Other Convictions

Individuals who have no convictions on their record for at least 10 years and have no charges pending may apply to a court to request that certain New York State convictions be sealed:

– Vote

In 2021, the NY Governor signed into law the automatic restoration of voting rights to a person upon release from a New York State correctional facility. However, you must register to vote like any other individual in the State.

- Individuals being released on their conditional release date or to parole supervision will receive a voter information and registration packet from their assigned parole officer at their first meeting.
- Individuals being released upon expiration of their sentence will receive voter information and a registration packet upon release.

You can also obtain voter registration forms and information absentee ballots from the [Westchester County Board of Elections \(citizenparticipation.westchestergov.com/register-to-vote\)](https://citizenparticipation.westchestergov.com/register-to-vote) website.

If you are in jail and have registered to vote, you can vote with an absentee ballot.

See this review of your voting rights

– Report Discrimination that is Based in Your Criminal Record

It is against the Civil Rights Act to be barred from employment because of a felony by an organization of 15 or more people *unless* the conviction is closely related to the job.

If you feel you have experienced employment discrimination, you can file a complaint with the [NY State Division of Human Rights \(dhr.ny.gov/\)](https://dhr.ny.gov/). Knowing your rights of employment and being clear about how your conviction is represented in public documents, such as a RAP sheet, is important. Learn more about RAP sheets on this page. More on finding employment is on the [Jobs](#) page of this site.

– Get Legal Assistance

A number of organizations are familiar with the challenges you face and can provide legal guidance and services.

Use the [Faith-Based Court Access program](#) to connect to tools and services in your community. Free services include access to a phone, computer, scanner, place to meet, and someone to talk to about getting assistance. The organizations listed below provide lawyers that will explain your rights and represent you in court.

In addition to organizations mentioned under other FIRST STEPS topics, several organizations provide information, referral, advocacy, and service. Go to [Renentry.Net/NY](https://www.renentry.net/), [LawHelpNY.org](https://www.lawhelpny.org/), and [NYCOURTS.GOV](https://www.nycourts.gov/) for substantial libraries of information on legal issues most relevant to those in reentry.

An annually updated list of advocacy and service organizations devoted to reentry issues is produced by the New York Public Library as part of their [NYPL Connections 2023](#). This resource focuses on services available in New York City and nationally, including [The Fortune Society](#) and [Exodus Transitional Community](#). See the table of contents for the section titled “Formerly Incarcerated People | Organizations.”

If you are currently in an abusive relationship or a survivor of domestic violence, civil legal representation is available from the [Pace Womens Justice Service \(law.pace.edu/legal-services\)](https://www.law.pace.edu/legal-services/). For shelters, see the special section under [Temporary Housing \(Shelters\)](#).

Linked below are several legal service organizations active in Westchester; note that some focus on civil matters, not criminal matters. Generally, you will need to contact these organizations first by email (often to complete a request form) and/or phone. Office hours are 9am-5pm weekdays unless otherwise indicated.

Faith Based Court Access Program

914.824.5613
nycourts.gov/courts/9jd/faith-based-court-access Westchester

Legal Aid Society of Westchester (LASW)

914-286-3400 info@laswest.org
laswest.org The Legal Aid Society

Legal Hand

914-425-5483
westchesterhelp@legalhand.org
legalhand.org/westchester
 Monday, Tuesday, Thursday 11am-

County, the 9th Judicial District, and area [\[Read More\]](#)

Westchester County Bar Association Lawyer Referral Service

914-761-5151 (Monday-Friday, 10am-4pm) lrs@wcbany.org
wcbany.org/index.cfm?pg=ReferralPublic \$40 non refundable fee to [\[Read More\]](#)

of Westchester County [\[Read More\]](#)

Legal Services of Hudson Valley (LSHV)

877-574-8529 lshv.org/contact and complete the form under "Get Legal Help" [\[Read More\]](#)

5pm; Wednesday 11am-7pm; Friday [\[Read More\]](#)

Sylvia Rivera Law Project (SRLP; transgender focus)

212-337-8550 147 West 24th Street, 5th Floor, New York, NY [\[Read More\]](#)



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