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## LETTER / STATEMENT OF EXPLANATION FOR CRIMINAL BACKGROUND

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People with a criminal background will need to be prepared for the questions that may arise when the employer asks about their criminal history.

There are two approaches to prepare:

- Write a **letter of explanation**
- Develop an **explanation speech**

In both approaches, briefly explain what happened and what you learned; keep it positive and don't dwell on the past. What you believe about yourself is what you project to others. Think like an advertiser: this is a marketing opportunity to demonstrate that you are the best fit for the position and the company.

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### What Have I Learned?

- What were some of the underlying issues that led to your choice to break the law?
- If those same situations came up today, how would you handle them?
- If your answer is different than the choices made in the past, demonstrate what you have learned from the experience.

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### Letter of Explanation

This is a written letter that can be presented to the employer. Use the same tips from the verbal explanation and:

- Make the letter **short** (one page or less) and **to the point**.
- Use **business English**, excellent punctuation and grammar.
- Use a **typical business letter format**: formal greeting, block paragraphs, single-spacing and formal closing.
- You may ask if background checks are part of the hiring process. Provide the letter once you know there is going to be a background check.

Dear Hiring Professional:

**First Paragraph:** List your conviction(s), the dates and a brief explanation of the circumstances (explain in two sentences or less and focus on the big picture). Express regret and responsibility.

**Second Paragraph:** Focus on how you have paid your debt to society and the ways in which you have improved your life. Sell the fact that the employer should not worry about your future choices by explaining what you have learned.

**Third Paragraph:** Discuss why you want to work for this employer, how your skills are a match, and how this position will help you reach your ultimate goals.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
John/Jane Doe

## Explanation Speech

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- Make your presentation **honest, clear and concise**.
- **Take responsibility** for your actions without excuses or blaming others.
- Sincerely **speak to the feelings you have** regarding your behavior – show remorse.
- In a positive way, **state the price you have paid and what you have learned** from this experience.
- Thoughtfully **discuss your goals** and steps you are taking to achieve them.
- **Discuss what skills you have** that meet the needs of the employer.
- Express **why the employer shouldn't worry** about your future choices.
- **Practice, Practice, Practice.**

## Work History on a Resume or Application

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If you engaged in work activities while incarcerated, do not put the Department of Corrections as your employer when completing the work history section of your resume (and/or the application).

- Instead, you can use the name of the facility where you were incarcerated (*ie: Seymore Johnson,*) State Department, or State of \_\_\_\_\_ (*name of your state*).
- You can use the position you held in the facility or your previous occupational title for the position title on your resume or application.

## Sealing a Criminal Record

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Information for sealing your record can be found on the Colorado Judicial Branch website:

[https://www.courts.state.co.us/Forms/Forms\\_List.cfm?Form\\_Type\\_ID=34](https://www.courts.state.co.us/Forms/Forms_List.cfm?Form_Type_ID=34)

## Having a Criminal Record Does Not Exclude You From the Workforce

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It may be harder to find opportunities – but they are out there.

- Utilize **community resources** for ex-offenders.
- Get your **foot in the door**: take a starter job to build skills, experience, references and to show your work ethic.
- Build/use a **personal network** to locate opportunities.
- Seek employment with **small & local companies**.
- Consider **self-employment** if you have experience in a trade.

**Be professional and have confidence in what you have to offer!**

**Need more help? Check out one of our Difficult Background workshops or ask about meeting with a trainer for help with your letter or statement of explanation.**