



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: FRESH START RECORD SCREENING & SEALING

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## GENERAL INFORMATION

### What is Fresh Start?

Fresh Start is a second-chance program that helps eligible community members get back on track after experiences with the criminal justice system by sealing their eligible criminal records and connecting them to key support services.

### Who can participate?

Free criminal record screening is available to anyone with a Harris County misdemeanor or felony charge that has been resolved and the case closed. The screening process will determine who is legally eligible for criminal record sealing.

### When and where is it held?

Fresh Start record screening and sealing events are held four times a year at the Harris County Jury Plaza, 1201 Congress St. in downtown Houston. For specific dates, go to [www.ccl.hctx.net/FreshStart.htm](http://www.ccl.hctx.net/FreshStart.htm). Online pre-registration is required for each event.

### How does Fresh Start benefit the community?

Fresh Start aims to help people meet their basic needs and become more productive citizens, which helps reduce recidivism and makes our communities safer.

### Who organizes and hosts Fresh start?

Fresh Start is offered by the Harris County Criminal Courts at Law and their community outreach arm, BAYOU City Community Court, in partnership with the Harris County Public Defender's Office, Harris County Criminal District Courts, Harris County Community Supervision and Corrections Department, and Harris County Constable Precinct 1.



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: FRESH START RECORD SCREENING & SEALING

## RECORD SEALING

### How does record sealing work in Texas?

Texas state law provides two ways to seal a criminal record in Texas:

- **Nondisclosure** seals your criminal record from public view. That means the charge doesn't have to be disclosed publicly — on job or apartment applications, for example — but can still be viewed by certain state or federal agencies.
- **Expunction** completely erases the arrest/charge. Expunctions are only available for charges that have been dismissed or no-billed by a grand jury and individuals who have been found not guilty at trial.

### Why is record sealing important?

Arrests/charges remain on your record, even if your case was dismissed. A criminal record can have long-lasting negative impacts. It can make it harder to get a job, rent an apartment, get into college, access financial aid or other loans, or obtain a professional license.

## PRE-REGISTRATION

### How do I pre-register?

Go to [www.ccl.hctx.net/FreshStart.htm](http://www.ccl.hctx.net/FreshStart.htm) and click on the "Pre-Registration" button, which will link you to the pre-registration form. From there, you will answer the qualifying questions and then complete and submit the form. *Note: Pre-registration is only available during designated times.*

### When can I pre-register?

Pre-registration is offered in conjunction with our quarterly Fresh Start events. It opens at noon on designated days. For specific dates, go to [www.ccl.hctx.net/FreshStart.htm](http://www.ccl.hctx.net/FreshStart.htm).

### How many screening slots do you have?

Space is limited. There are 300 screening slots for each quarterly event.

### How fast does pre-registration fill up?

Pre-registration fills very quickly — sometimes within 15 minutes due to the high demand for services. If you are planning to register, we encourage you to be ready to sign up right at noon.

### Can you send me a pre-registration reminder?

Yes! You can sign up for Fresh Start email and text reminders here: <https://bit.ly/FreshStartAlerts>.

### How do I know if I successfully pre-registered?

If your registration is submitted successfully, you will be redirected to a confirmation page with a 32-digit confirmation number. You should also receive a confirmation email with the same number. Please save this number as you may need it to access services.



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: FRESH START RECORD SCREENING & SEALING

## PRE-REGISTRATION (CONT'D)

### **What if I didn't get a registration confirmation number?**

If you do not receive a confirmation number, your pre-registration was not successfully submitted. This means you are not registered for the program and should re-submit your pre-registration form.

### **I successfully pre-registered. When will I know if I'm eligible for record sealing?**

You will be emailed no later than the week of the Fresh Start event. Please be sure to list your email address accurately on the pre-registration form and check your email inbox and junk mail folders regularly. If you have not received an update by 5 p.m. on the Tuesday before the event, please email [FreshStart@ccl.hctx.net](mailto:FreshStart@ccl.hctx.net). *Note: Requests for status updates will not be processed if they are sent before 5 p.m. on Tuesday.*

### **I didn't register in time. Can I get on a waiting list or come as a walk-in?**

No. We do not offer waiting lists or allow walk-ins.

### **Can I pre-register early, in person, or by phone or email?**

No. At this time, pre-registration is only available online. We do not offer early registration.

### **If I subscribed to Fresh Start news and event reminders, am I pre-registered?**

No. Fresh Start news and event reminders are separate from pre-registration.

## PRE-REGISTRATION TECHNICAL ISSUES

### **Help! I can't access the pre-registration form. What do I do?**

Pre-registration opens at noon on designated days. You will not be able to access the pre-registration form before noon on the designated days. Go to [www.ccl.hctx.net/FreshStart.htm](http://www.ccl.hctx.net/FreshStart.htm) for a list of pre-registration dates.

### **It's noon. Pre-registration is open, but I still can't access the form. What do I do?**

If you are unable to access the form after pre-registration opens, please try refreshing the website, clearing your cache, or using a different device or browser. If you try all of these options and still can't access the registration form, please email [FreshStart@ccl.hctx.net](mailto:FreshStart@ccl.hctx.net) with a screenshot of the error message you received.

## ELIGIBILITY

### **How do you determine eligibility?**

Eligibility is determined by state law. Specific requirements and mandatory waiting periods vary significantly depending on the criminal charge. After you pre-register, Fresh Start legal partners will review your Harris County criminal records to determine your eligibility. Fresh Start does not have the discretion to admit you into the record sealing program if you are not eligible under state law.



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: FRESH START RECORD SCREENING & SEALING

## ELIGIBILITY (CONT'D)

### **Can you tell me if I'm eligible before I sign up?**

No. You must pre-register online to be screened for eligibility.

### **Would it help you determine my eligibility if I explained my situation or provided references?**

No. Eligibility is determined by Texas state law. If you are found to be not eligible, Fresh Start does not have the discretion to change that.

### **Are there any charges that are not eligible for record sealing in Texas?**

Yes. Not all charges will be eligible to be expunged or sealed, regardless of how long ago they occurred. In Texas, eligibility is determined based on the disposition of the case. An individual review is required to accurately determine eligibility.

### **If I'm eligible, do I have to attend the Fresh Start event to get my record sealed?**

Yes. You must attend the corresponding Fresh Start event to receive services.

### **Can I get help from Fresh Start if my charges are from other counties or states?**

No. Only Harris County criminal records will be reviewed, as that is the limit of our jurisdiction. Out-of-county and out-of-state criminal records do not qualify for this program and will not be reviewed. However, criminal history outside Harris County may affect your eligibility determination.

### **Can I have my case sealed if I'm still completing my probation or deferred adjudication?**

No. Active cases cannot be sealed. Criminal records cannot be sealed until the case has been disposed of and any mandatory waiting periods have concluded.

## OTHER RESOURCES

### **Are there other record sealing resources if I don't get to pre-register for Fresh Start?**

Yes. If you do not want to wait for the next Fresh Start event, you can access these self-help legal resources:

[www.clearyourrecordharriscounty.org](http://www.clearyourrecordharriscounty.org) and [www.texaslawhelp.org](http://www.texaslawhelp.org). You can also seek out similar record sealing events held by other community organizations.

## PREVIOUS PARTICIPANTS

### **I already came to an event to get assistance sealing my eligible records. How can I get an update?**

Email [FreshStart@ccl.hctx.net](mailto:FreshStart@ccl.hctx.net) to request an update on the status of your case. Include your full name and date of birth.



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## EVICTIONS

### **Can I get an eviction record sealed or removed from my record?**

Fresh Start record sealing is for Harris County criminal cases only. There is not currently a legal way to have eviction records removed.

### **Do you have any other eviction resources?**

We offer a Know Your Rights Housing Workshop for Landlords & Tenants at Fresh Start events. The free come-and-go workshop includes a presentation on contracts, expectations, landlord and tenant rights, and the eviction process. There is also time for Q&A. No registration is needed. Learn more: [www.ccl.hctx.net/HousingRights.htm](http://www.ccl.hctx.net/HousingRights.htm).

## CONTACTS

### **My question is not included in the FAQs. How can I contact you?**

If you have a question that is not answered in the FAQs, you may email your question to [FreshStart@ccl.hctx.net](mailto:FreshStart@ccl.hctx.net). Please include your name and specific questions in the body of the email. You will receive a response within three business days. If your question is answered in the FAQs, you will not receive an individualized response.