

**State of California**  
**Office of Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr.**

**How to Apply for a Pardon**

Individuals who have been convicted of a crime in California may apply to the Governor for a pardon. A gubernatorial pardon is an honor that may be granted to people who have demonstrated exemplary behavior following their conviction. A pardon will not be granted unless it has been earned. Obtaining a pardon is a distinct achievement based upon proof of a productive and law-abiding life following conviction. Historically, governors have granted very few pardons.

Applications generally will not be considered unless the applicant has been discharged from probation or parole for at least 10 years without further criminal activity during that period. There is no fee for applying for a pardon.

The Governor of California cannot grant a pardon for a conviction from another jurisdiction, such as another state or a federal proceeding. A person convicted in another state must apply for a pardon in that state. Federal pardon information may be obtained from the Pardon Attorney, U.S. Department of Justice, 500 First Street Northwest, Washington, D.C. 20530.

**The Application Process**

For most people, the first step in applying for a pardon is to obtain a Certificate of Rehabilitation from the Superior Court in the county where the applicant currently lives. People who live outside of California and people who are ineligible for a Certificate of Rehabilitation must use a direct pardon application. The procedure utilized will depend on the circumstances of each applicant.

**1. Certificate of Rehabilitation**

A Certificate of Rehabilitation is a court order declaring that a person convicted of a crime is now rehabilitated. Generally, any person convicted of a felony who still resides in California may apply to the Superior Court in the county where he or she lives for a Certificate of Rehabilitation, provided that the applicant meets the legal requirements of demonstrated rehabilitation. There are special rules that apply to individuals convicted of sex offenses.

An application for a Certificate of Rehabilitation can usually be obtained from the court clerk, probation department, or public defender's office. Once a petition is filed, the court may require an investigation by the district attorney and will schedule a hearing.

If the Court issues a Certificate of Rehabilitation, the certificate is forwarded to the Governor's Office where it automatically becomes an application for a pardon. The Governor's receipt of a Certificate of Rehabilitation does not guarantee that a pardon will be granted.

**2. Direct Pardon**

The direct pardon procedure is available to people who are ineligible for a Certificate of Rehabilitation. This procedure is used primarily by people who were convicted of a crime in California and now reside outside the state. The direct pardon procedure is also available to people who are not eligible for a Certificate of Rehabilitation because they have been convicted of specified sex offenses or misdemeanor offenses.

Applicants for a direct pardon may obtain the application either by accessing the Governor's website at [www.gov.ca.gov](http://www.gov.ca.gov), or by requesting an application in writing at the following address:

**Governor's Office  
State Capitol  
Attention: Legal Affairs  
Sacramento, CA 95814**

The applicant should first complete the Application for Executive Clemency. Then the applicant must send the Notice of Intent to Apply for Executive Clemency to the District Attorney of each county in which the applicant was convicted so that each District Attorney receives the legally-required notice. The District Attorney acknowledges receipt of the Notice of Intent and returns the notice to the Governor's Office. Finally, the applicant should return the completed application to the Governor's Office at the address listed above.

### **The Review Process**

There is no requirement that the Governor take any action on an application for a pardon. Once a Certificate of Rehabilitation or a completed direct pardon application is received by the Governor's Office, the Office typically forwards the application to the Board of Parole Hearings (Board). The Board may conduct a background investigation and make a recommendation on whether a pardon should be granted. The Board may contact the District Attorney, investigating law enforcement agency, and other persons with relevant information on the applicant.

If the applicant has been convicted of more than one felony, the California Supreme Court must recommend granting a pardon before the Governor may do so. However, there is no obligation that the Governor seek a recommendation from the Supreme Court, in the first instance.

The length of time needed to complete the pardon process cannot be predicted. **Once a completed application has been received by the Governor's Office, it is not necessary to contact the Governor's Office to check on the status of an application.** If the Governor takes action on an application, the applicant will be notified. Applicants should notify the Governor's Office in writing if their mailing address changes.

### **Effect of a Pardon**

**A pardon does not seal the individual's criminal record or expunge the record of conviction, and the pardon is itself a public record.** When a pardon is granted, the California Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation are notified so that they may update their records on the applicant. The pardon is filed with the Secretary of State, reported to the Legislature, and is a public record. If a pardon is granted, the Certificate of Rehabilitation or the application for a direct pardon will be reported to the Legislature in an annual report and will become a public record. However, specific personal information will be redacted (hidden) before the Certificate of Rehabilitation or the application is made available to the public.

Please see the attached "Quick Reference for Restoration of Rights" for a detailed description of the effects of obtaining a Certificate of Rehabilitation and a pardon.

# CERTIFICATE OF REHABILITATION AND PARDON

## QUICK REFERENCE FOR RESTORATION OF RIGHTS

In California, the granting of a Certificate of Rehabilitation or a Governor’s pardon restores to the applicant some rights of citizenship that were forfeited as a result of a conviction.

CERTIFICATE OF REHABILITATION	GOVERNOR’S PARDON
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>DOES:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relieve <u>some</u> sex offenders, as specified, of further duty to register. (Pen. Code, § 290.5.)</li> <li>• Enhance a felon’s potential for licensing consideration by a State board. (Pen. Code, § 4853.)</li> <li>• Serve as an official document to demonstrate a felon’s rehabilitation, which could enhance employment possibilities.</li> <li>• Serve as an automatic application for a gubernatorial pardon.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>DOES NOT:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Erase the felony conviction or seal the criminal record. (Pen. Code, § 4852.17.)</li> <li>• Prevent the offense from being considered as a prior conviction if the person is later convicted of a new offense.</li> <li>• Allow a felon to answer on employment applications that he/she has no record of conviction.</li> <li>• Give a felon the right to vote, because this right is automatically restored after discharge from parole.</li> <li>• Restore the right to own or possess firearms.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>DOES:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow a felon to serve on a jury trial. (Code Civ. Proc., § 203 subd. (a)(5).)</li> <li>• Allow restoration of firearms rights, upon federal approval, to specified offenders who have obtained a certificate of rehabilitation if granted a full and unconditional pardon, <b><i>unless</i></b> the conviction was for a felony involving the use of a dangerous weapon. (Pen. Code, §4852.17.)</li> <li>• Allow a felon to be considered for appointment as a county probation officer or a state parole agent, but not to any other peace officer positions. (Gov. Code, § 1029, subd. (c).)</li> <li>• Allow specified sex offenders still required to register after obtaining a Certificate of Rehabilitation to be relieved of their duty to register if granted a full and unconditional pardon. (Pen. Code, § 290.5.)</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>DOES NOT:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seal or erase the record of conviction. (Pen. Code, § 4852.17.)</li> <li>• Prevent the pardoned offense from being considered as a prior conviction if the person is later convicted of a new offense.</li> <li>• Allow a pardoned person to answer on employment applications that he/she has no record of conviction.</li> <li>• Restore ability to own a firearm to felons convicted of any offense involving the use of a dangerous weapon. (Pen. Code, § 4854.)</li> <li>• Pardon convictions from another state, or federal convictions.</li> <li>• Necessarily prevent deportation.</li> </ul>