



## **Crafting an Effective Letter of Reference for an Individual with a Conviction Record**

When an individual with a conviction record is applying for a job, license, clearance to work, record sealing, or certificate of rehabilitation, they are often asked to present “evidence of rehabilitation.” This means documentation – like reference letters – highlighting positive change in a candidate’s life since their arrest or conviction. The goal is to show the decisionmaker that the candidate has many strengths, that their conviction record does not define them, and that the conviction(s) should not be a barrier to them obtaining the job, license, clearance, record sealing, or certificate.

This template can be used by someone writing a reference (e.g., employer, teacher, internship/volunteer supervisor, etc.) to describe their experience with the candidate in a way that addresses concerns that others may have about the candidate’s conviction(s). The template provides an outline for writing your letter, with suggestions of what to emphasize and how to do so.

The purpose of the letter is to:

- Explain how you know the candidate;
- Convey that the candidate has had a job, or had volunteer, educational, or other experiences where they worked independently, were trusted, and performed outstandingly; and
- State what makes the individual a strong candidate for the opportunity.

Write the letter on company letterhead if you work for the entity where you supervised or taught the candidate.

**Remember to change any text within brackets to fit the specific candidate.**

**Don’t forget to delete the suggested language and brackets before sending the letter!**



**For help with letters about New York residents, feel free to call the Legal Action Center.  
A staff member may be available to review the letter and make suggestions.  
Call 212-243-1313 Monday-Friday from 9am-5pm or visit us anytime at [www.lac.org](http://www.lac.org).**

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[Date]

[Recipient Name]

[Recipient Address/Email]

[Dear *Recipient Name*/To Whom It May Concern]:

I am writing a reference for [*name of candidate*] in regard to their application for [*fill in application type here – e.g., security guard; social worker license; sealing their record*].

[*Provide a brief overview of your relationship with candidate. Explain where you know them from and for how long.*]

[*Describe the work the candidate was doing when you knew them. Give details about the duties the candidate had and explain that they completed those duties successfully. If you knew them in an educational setting, describe the nature of the program. For a job or employment license application, it helps to emphasize duties the individual has successfully completed that will also be required in the new job or under a license.*]

[*If applicable, explain that you knew about the conviction and hired/worked with the candidate anyway and describe why. Provide examples that show the candidate has performed well in work or studies that required them to interact with others, required initiative, where they were independently responsible, where they were unsupervised and still did the work with no issues, or where they had gained a level of trust to be given the assignment. You don't need to have examples of each of these but describing at least one or two will help the reader see more than the candidate's conviction(s).*]

[*Explain that given your relationship to the candidate, you believe they are an excellent candidate. Consider summarizing their top three qualities, or saying that you would hire them again, or describing the dedication and work that they have put into moving past their conviction and creating positive change in their life.*]

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Contact information]