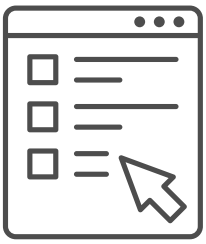

CERTIFICATE OF RELIEF (COR) GUIDE

What is a COR?

A Certificate of Relief (COR) is a court order that can reduce some of the barriers caused by a criminal record. It is only available for certain types of convictions:

- Any number of misdemeanors, and
- Up to three **Class H or I felonies** (convictions from the same session of court count as one).

A COR shows that the court recognizes you are taking positive steps forward.

- A COR does **not** erase, expunge, or pardon a conviction

Collateral Consequences

A conviction brings "collateral consequences." A COR helps in two ways:

1. **Collateral sanctions** (automatic penalties set by law)
    - Example: Certain felony convictions bar someone from serving as executive director of a childcare facility.
    - With a COR: These bans become *discretionary*, unless specifically excluded by law.
2. **Collateral disqualifications** (discretionary penalties by boards/agencies)
    - Example: The Board of Nursing may deny a license based on a conviction.
    - With a COR: The board must consider the COR, but may still deny the license.

How can a COR help?

- May make it easier to get jobs, housing, credit, and education.
- Makes some legal barriers discretionary instead of automatic.
- Employers, landlords, and licensing boards must consider it when reviewing your application.
- Organizations cannot be sued for hiring or serving someone who has a COR

What a COR cannot change

A COR will not:

- End sex offender registration
- Restore firearm rights
- Overturn driver's license restrictions
- Allow service in certain jobs (sheriff, probation/corrections officer, prosecutor, DA investigator)
- Lift federal bans (like some federally assisted housing or food stamp bans)

Who is eligible?

You may qualify if:

- You have no more than three Class H or I felonies (plus any number of misdemeanors).
- At least **12 months have passed** since finishing your sentence, including probation, supervision, and any required programs.
- You are working, seeking work, in school/training, or have another lawful source of support.
- You are not violating any current sentence.
- You do not have pending charges.

How to get a COR

1. **File a petition** in the court where you were convicted.
   - Filing fee: $50.
   - If you cannot afford it, you must file a **Petition to Sue/Appeal as an Indigent** and attach a **Civil Affidavit of Indigency** to request a fee waiver.
2. **Court review**
   - The district attorney will provide your criminal history to the court.
   - Victims will be notified.
3. **Hearing before a judge**
   - You must attend. The judge will ask questions and decide if you qualify.
4. **Decision**
   - If granted: The COR is entered as a public record.
   - If denied: You must wait **12 months** before filing again.

Key Takeaways

- A COR reduces many, but not all, collateral consequences of convictions.
- It is only available for misdemeanors and up to three Class H or I felonies.
- The process requires a petition, a fee (or indigency request), and a court hearing.
- If denied, you must wait a year before reapplying

More Information

See: North Carolina General Statutes, Chapter 15A, Article 6 (NCGS § 15A-173.1 through § 15A-173.7).

Access the COR Petition here:

FORWARD JUSTICE