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CERTIFICATE OF QUALIFICATION FOR HOUSING (CQH)

Ohio's housing-relief tool for people with criminal records

WHAT IS A CQH?

Ohio law contains hundreds of legal restrictions, making it difficult for people with criminal records to obtain housing, employment, and reentry success. A **certificate of qualification for housing (CQH)** helps people who have been impacted by the criminal legal system to overcome barriers while searching for housing after they reenter society. A CQH gives housing providers the discretion to rent or sell to CQH holders, knowing the holder is rehabilitated and the housing provider's civil liability is limited if they choose to rent to a CQH holder.

WHY ARE CQHs IMPORTANT?

More than 1,155 laws restrict an Ohioan's ability to secure and afford housing if they have a criminal record.

1,155
laws

61%

People who received supportive housing through the Returning Home Ohio Program after their release were 61% less likely to be incarcerated post-release.

People incarcerated more than once experience homelessness at a rate 13 times higher than the general population.

13x

WHAT DOES A CQH DO?

For the CQH Holder:

- **CQHs erase mandatory state legal barriers**—laws that absolutely prevent the person with the specific criminal record from renting or buying a residence. With a CQH, the housing provider is required to individually assess a CQH holder to determine whether they are fit for the residence. CQHs create flexibility.
- **CQHs create a “rebuttable presumption of rehabilitation” when you apply for housing.** This means that a person's criminal convictions are not enough evidence that the person is unfit for the housing opportunity.

For the Housing Provider:

- **Erasing housing provider fear**—when a tenant applicant has a CQH, the housing provider can be confident that they won't get sued if the new tenant does something bad in the future. **The CQH creates limited liability from negligent-leasing lawsuits.**
- **CQHs do not guarantee housing**—it allows, but does not require, housing providers to lease or sell you the residence.

CQHs cannot do any the following:

- Erase a criminal record
- Require housing providers to lease or sell to people with CQHs
- Affect sex offender registry requirements
- Affect federal or another state's barriers

Disclaimer: This guide is a general source of information about certificates of qualification for housing. It is not a substitute for individualized legal advice. For answers to specific questions, it is best to consult an attorney. If you have questions about CQH eligibility and other ways to overcome the housing barriers of a criminal record, contact Ashley Ward, Ohio Access to Justice Foundation Justice for All Fellow, by registering for OJPC's Second Chance Legal Clinic at www.ohiojpc.org.

CQH Process Roadmap



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To get a CQH, you will need to tell your story—what was going on in your life when you were convicted and how your life has changed. Getting a CQH also takes a great deal of persistence and attention to detail. Below is a general map of the steps involved. Every step may take more or less time depending on your pace, and how quickly the other government actors complete their parts. The overall process may take **3–6 months**.

Step 1: Check eligibility to apply

- You are eligible to file an application for a CQH if the applicable waiting period has passed:
 - 1 year after the end of incarceration or other sanctions for a felony, or
 - 6 months after the end of incarceration or other sanctions for a misdemeanor.
- A CQH does *not* create relief from any of the requirements imposed by Chapter 2950 of the R.C. (sex offender registry).

Step 2: Identify records and desired housing

- Think through the kinds of residences where you want to live.
- Gather information about *all* your criminal offenses.
- Think about the kinds of barriers you may face when applying for housing.
- *A CQH will not remove federal or another state's housing barriers.*

Step 3: Apply for a CQH

- Complete the multi-part application form created by the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC). The form can be found here: <https://ohiojpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/CQH-Petition.pdf>.

Step 4: File application in court

- **File the complete application from the ODRC with supporting documents, like letters of recommendation, in the court of common pleas:**
 - If you live in Ohio, file in the county you live.
 - If you do not live in Ohio, file in the county where you were convicted.
- There is a \$50 filing fee for CQH petitions. If you do not have enough income to pay for the filing fee, **ask the court for a filing fee waiver.**

Step 5: Court investigation and hearing

- The court will gather information from every other Ohio court where you have a conviction. There is no time limit on the investigation process.
- After the court completes its investigation, it has 60 days to make a decision.
- The prosecutor may object and seek input from any crime victims from your past offenses.
- **The court may hold a hearing for your CQH application, but it is not required to.**

Step 6: CQH granted! (Or not.)

- If the court decides in your favor, it will issue an order granting you a CQH. **This court order is the CQH. The court may also provide a certificate to represent the CQH.**
- You or any housing provider may verify the validity of your CQH with the court that granted it. Check to make sure your name is listed.
- If the court denies your CQH, you may appeal. The court may put conditions on you reapplying, such as completing certain programs or waiting longer to demonstrate your rehabilitation.
- A CQH will be revoked if the holder is later convicted of an offense of violence. See R.C. 2901.01.