

VIRGINIA BOARD OF COUNSELING

Impact of Criminal Convictions, Impairment, and Past History on Licensure, Certification or Registration by the Virginia Board of Counseling

INTRODUCTION

This document provides information for persons interested in becoming a licensed professional counselor, licensed marriage and family therapist, licensed substance abuse treatment practitioner, certified substance abuse counselor, certified substance abuse counseling assistant, certified rehabilitation provider, registered qualified mental health professional or registered peer recovery specialist. It clarifies how convictions, impairment, and other past history may affect the application process and subsequent licensure, certification or registration by the Board of Counseling.

Until an individual applies for licensure, certification or registration, the Board of Counseling is unable to review, or consider for approval, an individual with a criminal conviction, history of action taken in another jurisdiction, or history of possible impairment. The Board has no jurisdiction until an application has been filed.

GUIDELINES FOR PROCESSING APPLICATIONS FOR LICENSURE, CERTIFICATION OR REGISTRATION: APPLICATION, EXAMINATION, ENDORSEMENT, AND REINSTATEMENT

Applicants for licensure, certification, or registration by application, examination, endorsement and reinstatement who meet the qualifications as set forth in the law and regulations may be issued a license, certificate or registration pursuant to authority delegated to the Executive Director of the Board in accordance with the Board of Counseling Regulations.

An applicant whose license, certification or registration has been revoked or suspended in another jurisdiction is not eligible for licensure, certification or registration in Virginia unless the credential has been reinstated by the jurisdiction which revoked or suspended it.

Affirmative responses to any questions on applications related to grounds for the Board to refuse to admit a candidate to an examination, refuse to issue a license, certificate or registration or impose sanction shall be referred to the Executive Director to determine how to proceed. The Executive Director, or designee, may approve the application without referral to the Credentials Committee in the following cases:

1. The applicant presents a history of substance use disorder with evidence of continued abstinence and recovery. The Executive Director cannot approve applicants for reinstatement if the license, certificate or registration was revoked or suspended by the Board or if it lapsed while an investigation was pending.
2. The applicant has a history of criminal conviction(s) consisting solely of misdemeanor convictions, or one non-violent felony conviction, which does not constitute grounds for denial or Board action and all court/probationary/parole requirements have been met.

BASIS FOR DENIAL OF LICENSURE, CERTIFICATION OR REGISTRATION

The Board of Counseling may refuse to admit a candidate to any examination or refuse to issue a license, certificate or registration to any applicant with a conviction of a felony or a misdemeanor involving moral turpitude. The Board may also refuse licensure as a professional counselor, marriage and family therapist, and substance abuse treatment practitioner, certification as a substance abuse counselor, substance abuse counselor assistant or rehabilitation provider, and registration as a qualified mental health professional or peer recovery specialist to an applicant unable to practice with reasonable skill and safety to clients by reason of illness, abusive use of alcohol, drugs, narcotics, chemicals, or other type of material or as the result of any mental or physical condition.

Misdemeanor convictions involving moral turpitude mean convictions related to lying, cheating or stealing. Examples include, but are not limited to: reporting false information to the police, shoplifting or concealment of merchandise, petit larceny, welfare fraud, embezzlement, and writing worthless checks. While information must be gathered regarding all convictions, misdemeanor convictions other than those involving moral turpitude will not prevent an applicant from becoming licensed, certified, or registered. However, if the misdemeanor conviction information also suggests a possible impairment issue, such as DUI and illegal drug possession convictions, then there still may be a basis for denial during the application process.

Criminal convictions for ANY felony may cause an applicant to be denied licensure, certification or registration. *Each applicant is considered on an individual basis. There are NO criminal convictions or impairments that are an absolute bar to licensure, certification or registration by the Board of Counseling.*

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION NEEDED REGARDING CRIMINAL CONVICTIONS, PAST ACTIONS, OR POSSIBLE IMPAIRMENTS

Applications for licensure, certification or registration include questions about the applicant's history, specifically:

1. Any and all criminal convictions ever received;
2. Any past action taken against the applicant in another state or jurisdiction, including denial of licensure, certification or registration in another state or jurisdiction; and
3. Any mental or physical illness, or chemical dependency condition that could interfere with the applicant's ability to practice.

Indicating "yes" to any questions about convictions, past actions, or possible impairment does not mean the application will be denied. It means more information must be gathered and considered before a decision can be made, which delays the usual application and testing process. Sometimes an administrative proceeding is required before a decision regarding the application can be made. The Board of Counseling has the ultimate authority to approve an applicant for testing and subsequent licensure, certification or registration, or to deny approval.

The following information will be requested from an applicant with a criminal conviction:

- A certified copy of all conviction orders (obtained from the courthouse of record);
- Evidence that all court ordered requirements were met (i.e., letter from the probation officer if on supervised probation, paid fines and restitution, etc.);
- A letter from the applicant explaining the factual circumstances leading to the criminal offense(s); and
- Letters from employers concerning work performance (specifically from Counseling-related employers, if possible).

The following information will be requested from the applicant with past disciplinary action or licensure/certification/registration denial in another state:

- A certified copy of the Order for disciplinary action or denial from the other state licensing entity; and certified copy of any subsequent actions (i.e. reinstatement), if applicable;
- A letter from the applicant explaining the factual circumstances leading to the action or denial; and
- Letters from employers concerning work performance (Counseling-related preferred) since action.

The following information may be requested from applicants with a possible impairment:

- Evidence of any past treatment (i.e., discharge summary from outpatient treatment and inpatient hospitalizations);
- A letter from the applicant's current treating healthcare provider(s) indicating diagnosis, treatment regimen, compliance with treatment, and ability to practice safely;
- A letter from the applicant explaining the factual circumstances of condition or impairment and addressing ongoing efforts to function safely (including efforts to remain compliant with treatment, maintain sobriety, attendance at AA/NA meetings, etc.); and
- Letters from employers concerning work performance (specifically from counseling-related employers, if possible).

NOTE: Some applicants may be eligible for the Health Practitioner's Monitoring Program (HPMP), which is a monitoring program for persons with impairments due to chemical dependency, mental illness, or physical disabilities. Willingness to participate in the HPMP is information the Board of Counseling will consider during the review process for applicants with a history of impairment or a criminal conviction history related to impairment. Information about the Virginia HPMP may be obtained directly from the DHP homepage at www.dhp.virginia.gov.

Once the Board of Counseling has received the necessary and relevant additional information, the application will be considered. Some applicants may be approved based on review of the documentation provided. Other applicants may be required to meet with Board of Counseling members for an informal fact finding conference to consider the application. After the informal fact-finding conference, the application may be: i) approved, ii) approved with conditions or terms, or iii) denied.

NOTE: Failure to reveal criminal convictions, past disciplinary actions, and/or possible impairment issues on any application for licensure, certification or registration is grounds for disciplinary action by the Board of Counseling, even after the license, certification, or registration has been issued. It is considered to be “procurement of license by fraud or misrepresentation,” and a basis for disciplinary action that is separate from the underlying conviction, past action, or impairment issue once discovered. Possible disciplinary actions that may be taken range from reprimand to revocation of a license, certificate or registration.

FOLLOWING LICENSURE, CERTIFICATION OR REGISTRATION

Criminal convictions and other actions can also affect an individual already licensed, certified or registered by the Board of Counseling. Any felony conviction, court adjudication of incompetence, or suspension or revocation of a license, certificate or registration held in another state will result in a “mandatory suspension” of the individual’s license, certificate or registration to practice in Virginia. This is a nondiscretionary action taken by the Director of DHP, rather than the Board of Counseling, according to § 54.1-2409 of the Code of Virginia. The mandatory suspension remains in effect until the individual applies for reinstatement and appears at a formal hearing before the Board of Counseling and demonstrates sufficient evidence that he or she is safe and competent to return to practice. At the formal hearing, three fourths of the Board members present must agree to reinstate the individual's license, certificate or registration to practice in order for it to be restored.

GETTING A CRIMINAL RECORD EXPUNGED

Having been granted a pardon, clemency, or having civil rights restored following a felony conviction does not change the fact that a person has a criminal conviction. That conviction remains on the individual’s licensure, certification or registration record. Therefore, any criminal conviction *must* be revealed on any application for licensure, certification or registration, unless it has been expunged. Individuals should secure private legal counsel for questions related to criminal conviction expungement, a process over which the Board has no control.