

Letters of Explanation

Some employment specialists believe that it is helpful to include additional information about justice system involvement when turning in job applications (more than “will discuss in interview”). These employment specialists have advised their clients to attach a “letter of explanation” to job applications. The letter is meant to explain the person’s convictions and how the person is working to change his or her life. Attached is a sample letter of explanation.

It is important to note that these letters have limitations. For example:

- Job seekers should not rely on letters of explanation. It is still crucial to make face-to-face contact with employers in order to explain the criminal history. Employers are most likely to hire a person when they begin to engage in a relationship with the person and believe that the person is sincere about changing his or her life.
- Employment specialists should not rely on letters of explanation. The relationships that employment specialists build with employers are critical to helping many people with justice system involvement to re-enter the workforce. Talking to an employer with whom you have a relationship about the qualifications of a job seeker is an effective way to help that job seeker get an interview.
- Employment specialists must also know the person’s history including the situation(s) that led to the arrest(s) since they may be called upon to answer questions or reassure the employer that the person is not likely to re-offend.
- Think about who will see the letter. If the application and letter are handed to a receptionist or cashier, it is possible that a person’s future co-workers will have private information about the person. Try to hand the letter to a hiring manager or consider leaving the letter off.

Finally, help the job seeker include information about the skills and experiences s/he can bring to the company. The letter should focus on strengths that the person has, as well as his or her justice system involvement.

March 12, 20XX

John Nowak
123 Main Street, Apt 1
Chicago, IL

Jay's Steakhouse
555 Main Street
Anywhere, State

To Whom It May Concern:

Joe's Barber Shop ensures that every guest has a memorable experience through the use of "Joe's Excellence Program" which reinforces quality, service and cleanliness. I believe that I can contribute to this effort through my experience in food prep and training in sanitary kitchen practices. I enjoy kitchen work and would appreciate the opportunity to work at your restaurant.

On the attached application, I indicated that I have a legal history. I've included this letter to explain my justice system involvement, and also to provide information about how I am moving my life forward.

Eleven years ago, I was convicted of a sex offense. This occurred during a time when my life was out of control due to a drinking problem and divorce. I realize that what I did was wrong. It was a terrible mistake and I truly regret my actions on that day. After completing my prison sentence, I became involved in mental health treatment and Alcoholics Anonymous. I am sober now and am a sponsor for someone else in the program. I plan to continue working with a counselor and attending AA groups. Going to work is also part of my recovery because I want to support myself.

Please consider my experience and qualifications for this job. I am a hard worker and rarely missed a day of work at my last job. I would appreciate an opportunity to speak with you about my background, as well as my desire to work for your restaurant.

Sincerely,

John Nowak
(123) 456-7890