



Text reminders reduce failure to appear rates and backlogs

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Among the most popular questions that the [National Center for State Courts \(NCSC\)](#) receives pertains to court records and criminal background checks. In short, whether online or on paper, court records do not provide a person's criminal history and can provide an incomplete or misleading understanding of the person being reviewed.

First, there is no single website that contains ALL state court records for ALL states for ALL time. In many states, a statewide portal does not exist; California is perhaps the biggest example of this. If there is a statewide portal, it may not be comprehensive. Arizona's statewide portal covers [177 out of 184 courts as of August 2022](#). NCSC does provide a page with links to most [court websites](#). However, with thousands of trial courts not all courts may be listed, and even if they are, they may not have online docket or document access.

Second, online court records are not the official records of the court. They are provided for informational purposes only and may be subject to error or omission. Most states and counties that have online access portals place disclaimers and warnings to this effect.

Third, the use of such records against a person may be prohibited by state law. For example, the [Wisconsin Circuit Court Access \(WCCA\)](#) portal warns that "It may be a violation of state law to discriminate against a job applicant because of an arrest or conviction record. Generally speaking, an employer may refuse to hire an applicant on the basis of a conviction only if the circumstances of the conviction substantially relate to the particular job."

Fourth, most such systems rely exclusively on names which may be misleading. Without additional identifying information such as date of birth or social security number, etc., it is impossible to tell one person from another based solely on a name. Because of this and in some circumstances, a state criminal history system may run a confirmed biometric identifier (fingerprint) report on request for a fee for activities within that state. These searches have nothing to do with the courts. [Maryland's Judiciary](#), for example, specifically warns that

“Background checks should be conducted through the Criminal Justice Information System (CJIS) of the Department of Public Safety & Correctional Services which maintains Maryland’s fingerprint-supported criminal identification records and criminal history record information.”

How are people using your state’s court records? Share your experiences with us at Knowledge@ncsc.org or call 800-616-6164. Follow the National Center for State Courts on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [Vimeo](#).

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