

The individual for whom the search is being conducted must complete an Authorization to Conduct Criminal Record Check - see *Appendix C*.

It is possible to check the Wisconsin records of an individual's criminal and civil cases from at least the mid 1990's for most counties (except Portage, which is still not online) using the Circuit Court Access Program (CCAP) maintained under the supervision of the Wisconsin Supreme Court, but actually recorded by the Clerks of Court in the 71 of the 72 counties in Wisconsin.

Mental commitments, guardianship proceedings and Children's Court proceedings are not included.

CCAP is a valuable starting point for conducting background checks, but is really just a starting point. Going to the actual court record is often the only way to determine the ultimate outcome of a case or the seriousness of the initial charge. For instance, one count of a non support case involving no abuse of a child is listed as a "crimes against children" in CCAP nomenclature. On the other hand, an innocuous "disorderly conduct" case may really involve serious domestic violence.

Dismissals or reductions in charges are often confusing, and many clerks in very busy courts compress their CCAP entries so that what went on is not at all easy to discern. These records are essentially for court record keeping, and were opened to the public after the fact.

Further, there are numerous warnings in the CCAP materials themselves about not misusing the record of a charged, but dismissed case, or a case where the charge has no relevance to employment being sought, even if there is a conviction.

That said CCAP is an invaluable **starting point** for research into an individual's history of contact with the Wisconsin State Court system.

How to Search CCAP

Go to www.wicourts.gov. You will see the Wisconsin Supreme Court's home page, with picture of Chief Justice Abrahamson and many other interesting links. Look above Justice Abrahamson's picture; you will see a bar with several choices going across the top. Click "case search" and when the drop down menu appears, click "Circuit Court". You are now "in" CCAP". But before clicking "I agree", please do read the material; it's useful. Then go ahead and click "I agree" and the screen pops up that allows you to put in a person's name and date of birth, and ask for a search of Wisconsin circuit court records - criminal and civil.

The rest of the website is pretty straight forward, at least to people familiar with legal records.

Using the CCAP is just a beginning. If you aren't a lawyer, you may need some help understanding what you are seeing, and, even if you are a lawyer, going to the actual record is often essential.

How to Search Milwaukee Municipal Court

This web site, maintained by the City of Milwaukee, will enable you to check whether a person has cases in the Milwaukee Municipal ("muni") court system. Many cases which might have been charged as state criminal charges instead resolved by disorderly conduct tickets in municipal court.

Most of what you will find in "muni court" records will be parking or other traffic violations, but occasionally, conduct which could be of real concern to a church accepting volunteer services or hiring a person who will be in the building and around children will show up in municipal court records.

Go to www.city.milwaukee.gov, then put in "municipal court" where it says "site search". That gets you where you want to go. Then, click on "Case Search" and choose to search by name. The rest is pretty clear. You will probably turn up parking tickets or driving problems, but if you turn up "disorderly conduct", it is probably worth a trip to the court to examine the file.

In sum, public access to computerized court records is a tremendously helpful starting point for individuals and institutions who want accurate information about an individual who is presenting himself or herself to you for whatever reason. But the information really is just a beginning and should not be taken for more than it is - a clerk's shorthand for what happened in an individual case.

For records outside of Wisconsin, you will need to learn how to access other states' versions of CCAP or employ a search firm with the capability to do that.

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