



PBSA Position: Fingerprint-Based Background Checks

The Professional Background Screening Association (PBSA) believes fingerprint-based background checks are a useful tool when conducting background screening, but they don't provide a comprehensive history and should not be solely relied upon for obtaining complete and up-to-date information.

Fingerprint-based background checks often do not provide a full picture of an individual's criminal history.

- A fingerprint search only reflects information received by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) from states and municipalities.
- A 2015 Government Accountability Office (GAO) Report found significant gaps in the FBI database as many state and local jurisdictions fail to report arrest records or a court disposition to the FBI.
- This reliance on a single database, which is premised upon a passive collection system, can lead to a large number of incomplete or even inaccurate files.

There is no single database containing comprehensive records regarding a person's criminal history.

- The FBI criminal history database is incomplete with significant gaps, contrary to popular belief that it is the "gold standard." For example, not all jurisdictions provide information to the database.
- According to former Attorney General Eric Holder, the purpose of the FBI database is to aid law enforcement during investigations and "was not designed to be used to determine whether or not someone is eligible for a work opportunity."
- Only 20 states reported that 75 percent or more of the records from their state included final dispositions, according to the GAO Report.

A comprehensive screen should use a combination of both private databases and primary source data.

- Using an applicant's personal identifiers, and depending on the client's needs, a professional background screen can include a search of criminal history information utilizing a combination of both private databases and primary source data (such as county, state and federal repositories). Databases can be used to cast a wide net which identifies jurisdictions where records may exist and therefore should be verified directly at the jurisdictional level.
- According to GAO research, the use of private companies to conduct criminal history record checks appears to be increasing because of client demand and the ability to provide benefits, such as faster response times.
- The Department of Justice has stated that "users may not want to rely exclusively on an FBI and state repository checks and may also want to check other record sources, such as commercial databases and local courthouses, to obtain more complete and up-to-date information." (The Attorney General's Report on Criminal History Background Checks, June 2006)