

7 COLLATERAL CONSEQUENCES OF A GUILTY PLEA

1. Loss of employment opportunities. A conviction can have long-lasting employment consequences, depending on what type of work you do. For example, a conviction for fraud or theft will have negative consequences if you work in retail or finance or banking. Likewise, if you are convicted of a drug offense or a crime of violence, your conviction will severely impede your opportunities for employment in childcare or teaching. If you require a license to engage in your chosen profession (e.g., a license to practice law or medicine), conviction of certain crimes may result in the revocation of your license.

2. Loss of driving privileges. A DUI conviction routinely results in the suspension of the driver's license. A drug conviction also may result in the loss of your driver's license. If you drive a commercial vehicle, your license may be suspended for a wide variety of convictions (which also may result in negative employment consequences).

3. Loss of the right to possess firearms. Under federal law, it is a felony for anyone convicted of a crime punishable by more than one year in prison to possess a firearm. There is an exception for crimes classified as misdemeanors under state law, but only if the maximum possible sentence (not the sentence actually imposed) is two years or less. Moreover, depending on the crime for which you are convicted, possession of a firearm also may be illegal under state law.

4. Loss of voting privileges. State laws vary, but many states disenfranchise convicted felons.

5. Loss of eligibility for some government programs. A conviction for drug trafficking or drug possession will disqualify you from receiving federal student assistance loans and from living in federally subsidized housing. In some states, a drug-related conviction will bar you from receiving government assistance or food stamps.

6. Registration as a sex offender. If you are convicted of certain sex offenses, you must register with the state police. If you move, you must inform the state police in your new area of your status as a convicted sex offender. Other potential consequences of a sex offense conviction also may apply (e.g., you may be prohibited from living within 1,000 feet of a school), depending on state law.

7. Immigration consequences. If you are a U.S. citizen, you cannot be deported or excluded from the country for a criminal conviction. If your immigration status is anything other than "citizen," you can be deported or excluded, depending on the crime for which you are convicted. For example, a conviction for an "aggravated felony" (e.g., trafficking in controlled substances, crimes of violence, sexual abuse of minors, and many fraud and theft offenses) results in nearly automatic deportation.