



Public Access Software Specification for Court Records

Version 2.0

PASS Task Force

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The Consumer Data Industry Association (CDIA) is the voice of the consumer reporting industry, representing consumer reporting agencies including the nationwide credit bureaus, regional and specialized credit bureaus, background check and residential screening companies, and others. Founded in 1906, CDIA promotes the responsible use of consumer data to help consumers achieve their financial goals, and to help businesses, governments and volunteer organizations avoid fraud and manage risk. Through data and analytics, CDIA members empower economic opportunity all over the world, helping ensure fair and safe transactions for consumers, facilitating competition and expanding consumers' access to financial and other products suited to their unique needs. CDIA is online at www.cdiaonline.org. Inquires can be directed to cdia@cdiaonline.org.

About PBSA

Founded as a non-profit trade association in 2003, the Professional Background Screening Association was established to represent the interest of companies offering employment and tenant background screening services. The PBSA is an international trade association of over 900 member companies. Its members provide employment and tenant background screening related services to virtually every industry around the globe. The reports prepared by PBSA's background screening members are used by employers, volunteer organizations, and property managers every day to ensure that workplaces and residential communities are safe for all who work, reside, or visit there. Visit PBSA online at www.thepbsa.org or send inquiries to info@thebpsa.org.

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Revision History

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PBSA Staff	02/27/2020		

1. Introduction

With the growth of background screening for on-demand workers, continuous screening of employees, and a growing workforce, the need to access accurate criminal records in a timely manner will continue to put additional burdens on Court Clerks. Criminal History Public Record Users have created several unique private criminal history systems to handle the high volume of transactions, into which Courts are Contributors/Furnishers of data. However, there is not a consistent format or access method into the various court systems around the nation. Our industry does not have a natural channel to provide input to improve public record sources, as we do for private records sources (e.g. credit data furnisher) and we face liability exposure as a result of the patchwork of current criminal history public record systems. Therefore, given that context today, the PASS committee feels it vital to engage in a dialogue that improves criminal history records administration for the purpose of background screening and related uses, reflecting the expertise and best practices of both public sector providers and private sector users.

1.1 Purpose

The PASS Task Force is intended to work with providers of court administration software to create a "Public Access Software Specification" that facilitates the court administrators' ability to implement software that improves the quality of the public record, providing complete and accurate information concerning the individual about whom the report relates and would include the following:

(a) a set of standard options for what information must be included in search requests, what information will be provided in results, and how search request information will (transparently) be matched to records; and

(b) a set of standard options for what information will be included in bulk files, and what types of files are provided (full file refreshes, adds, changes, deletes).

1.2 Intended Audience and Reading Suggestions

This document is intended for Court Researchers, Data Aggregators, Consumer Reporting Agencies, Court Administrators, Law Enforcement Records Administration, Court Software/Platform Providers and Software Developers that interact with the Court Administration Software. This document will walk through a number of different methods to interact with the Courts' systems and platforms for records.

1.3 Access Standardization Project Scope

These standards establish technical and operational requirements for access to electronic court records by the public, special user groups, judges, and court and clerk's office personnel.

2. Interface Requirements

2.1 Data Dictionary

The following terms and descriptions are elements that should be available through a PASS connection.

Data Element	Data Definition
Full Name	First, Middle, Last, Suffix parsed into their appropriate field.
Alias	All alternative names the individual is known under. This information may be provided either in one field with multiple values concatenated with the pipe () delimiter between values. Or, this information may be provided in a separate table or file with a Foreign Key specified.
DOB	Data of Birth; full value. Please specify data format use or output in a standard Date Format or use CCYYMMDD
Address_1	Street Address of individual
Address_2	Street Address of individual
City	City
State	State
Zip	5 or 9-digit Zip Code
Address_Date	The last time the accuracy of the Address information was confirmed.
SSNSSN	Social Security Number or ITIN (when permitted for release)
DL_number	Driver's License Number
Phone	Phone or Cell Phone Number
Court	Court Name from which Records is reported from
Court_County	County Represented by the Court
Case_Number	Court Generated Case Number that is used in reference to identify the Court Record.
Case Type	Criminal, Infraction/Ordinance, and or Traffic

Case_Status	Current Status of Court Case. If list of codes is utilized, please provide
	corresponding Code translations for reference; this can be provided in
	separate file, table, or documentation.
Offense Date	Date of Offense. Please specify data format use or output in a standard
	Date Format or use CCYYMMDD
Arrest_Date	Date of Arrest. Please specify data format use or output in a standard Date
	Format or use CCYYMMDD
File_Date	Date when Case was filed. Please specify data format use or output in a
	standard Date Format or use CCYYMMDD
Charge_Type	Classification of Charge or Offense. If list of codes is utilized, please provide
enarge_rype	corresponding Code translations for reference; this can be provided in
	separate file, table, or documentation.
Offense	Description of Offense
Offense_Level	Grading or level of offense – Misdemeanor, Felony, Citation, Traffic. If list
	of codes is utilized, please provide corresponding Code translations for
	reference; this can be provided in separate file, table, or documentation.
Statute_Reference	Listing of the corresponding Statute outlining the Charge.
Plea	Plea entered by the individual or accepted by the court
Disposition	Current Disposition of Case. If list of codes is utilized, please provide
	corresponding Code translations for reference; this can be provided in
	separate file, table, or documentation.
Count Data	Next school ded count date for reading coope
Court Date	Next scheduled court date for pending cases
Case Transfer	Court Name and Case Number if case is transferred
Disposition_Date	Date the current disposition was entered. Please specify data format use
	or output in a standard Date Format or use CCYYMMDD
Sentencing_Info	Details related to the Sentencing of individual, to include Length of
Sentening_injo	Sentence, Dates entering or exiting of incarceration, probation, parole, etc
	Sentence, Dates entering of exiting of incarceration, probation, parole, etc
	Fines
	Court Costs

	Restitution
	Fees/Assessments
	Probation
	Jail
	Parole
	Probation Violation(s) – Include Sentence Updates
Search Scope	The search criteria used to generate the data. Examples could be
	Filing_Date range, Name, etc.
	Party Type
	Case Category
	Case Type
	Case Judgement

2.2 Court Access Methods

Over time, there has been the development of multiple access methods to court records. From paper case files, onsite terminals, bulk file distribution, to online portals, these different access methods have been known to provide different information on the same case. These disparate access methods must return consistent and reliable information across all access points to ensure reliability and accuracy in the court systems.

Within each method of access, the search logic, input options, and fields returned shall be consistent and updated in real time. If all methods of access are consistent and reliable, Court Researchers will be able to use the least intrusive method and will reduce the burden on the Clerks within the Court Office.

In the following sections, this document will outline the different known interfaces to access Court Records and provide guidance on how each method can or shall be utilized.

2.3 Court Record Interfaces

There are multiple methods to access Court Records, each with their own benefit and limitation.

- I. Court Clerk office, onsite, terminal access
- II. Web-based portal for public viewing of Court Records
 - a. Free site

- b. Subscription Aggregate or Transactional
- III. Web-based API access
- IV. Bulk Record distribution

2.4 Onsite or Online Public Index

Prior to searching onsite or online public index, Court Researchers shall first understand any rules, policies and procedures in using the court system. Court Researchers must ensure to use only the most current, complete, best possible source of public record in performing their search. The Public Index should have at least 7 to 10 years of court record data. If it does not, a supplemental search with the Court Clerk may be needed.

- I. Courts to provide maximum convenient access to electronic court records online, direct integration or courthouse terminals with following criteria
 - a. A single point of access to court information and documents for all courts in the county and entire state if feasible
 - a. Access should account for multiple users of the system at the same time (i.e. ability to handle heavy internet traffic or provide enough terminals at the court to handle public demand)
 - b. Indexes should allow for:
 - i. Ease of Use
 - ii. Intuitive interfaces
 - iii. Easy to understand terminology to assist in the search function
 - iv. Language translation capability
 - v. Ability to search for cases and documents using party name or case number, with initial screening for cast type
 - vi. Ability to narrow down data by dates
 - vii. Ability to use Soundex or wildcards
 - viii. Ability to verify that a person whose records are found is the person for whom information is sought
 - ix. Ability to export or print court record data
 - b. Reasonable Access fees if applicable
 - a. Fees charged for access to electronic court information should be as low as possible, should be reasonably related to the cost of the maintaining and providing access to the information and should not serve as a barrier to court user and/or public access to such information
 - b. Opportunity to verify the identity of a document before paying for it

2.5 Court API

When possible and permissible, court shall provide a secure API gateway to allow access to Court Record data. If permissible, court shall provide the ability to retrieve public Case Details or to Verify non-public Case Details such as SSN, complete DOB, or complete case details.

2.5.1 Case Detail API

The Case Detail API should allow for the following search parameters and return results that conform to or are similar to elements defined in the <u>Data Dictionary</u>.

2.5.1.1 Search Parameters

- I. Name
 - a. Ability to Search by following methods
 - i. Soundex
 - ii. Name Variation
 - iii. Partial Name
 - iv. Wildcard character [*]
- II. Name + DOB
 - a. Ability to match on DOB by the following methods
 - i. DOB exact
 - ii. DOB partial
 - 1. MM/DD/YY
 - 2. MM/YY
 - 3. YEAR
 - 4. MM/DD
 - 5. DOB range
- III. Case Number
- IV. Disposition Date Range
- V. Filing Date Range
- VI. Court Case Type
- VII. County
- VIII. Court
- IX. Party Type
- X. Case Status
- XI. Case Category
- XII. Case Judgement

2.5.1.2 Search Match Indicators

Court API responses should indicate the parameters matched upon and the level of accuracy for which is was matched.

- I. Input Parameter Matched
 - a. Match, Near Match, No Match
 - Parameter Examples

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- a. Name
 - i. First_Name, Middle_Name, Last_Name
 - ii. Match, Near Match, No Match. (May use Edit Distance to determine Near Match quality.)
- b. Name + DOB
 - i. Match
 - 1. Same as II.a
 - 2. DOB match levels
 - a. Partial
 - i. YOB (Year of Birth)
 - b. Partial Not matched
 - i. Day, Month, Year not matched
 - c. DOB or YOB not available.

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- ii. No Match
 - 1. Partial Parameter conflicts with information on File
- iii. Not Available
 - 1. DOB not available on file

2.5.2 Case Verification API

The Case Verification API shall provide a method for verification of the Case as to whether it pertains to a specific individual or not. The API shall allow for the following Search Parameters and Match Responses:

2.5.2.1 Search Parameters

- I. Name + Case Number
 - a. Confirmation Parameter
 - i. DOB, Middle name or initial
 - ii. SSN
 - iii. Address , partial address or county, DL Number

2.5.2.2 Response Indicators

The Response from the Case Verification API shall provide an indication of whether the input Search Parameters match the information contained within the Case File.

- I. Confirmation Parameter Match Indicator
 - a. Match
 - b. No Match
 - c. Not Available
- II. Example
 - a. Input
 - i. <Name> Doe, John </Name>
 - ii. <Case>2017CR000001</Case>
 - iii. <SSN>123456789</SSN>
 - b. Response 1
 - i. <Name> Doe, John </Name>
 - ii. <Case>2017CR000001</Case>
 - iii. <SSN>Match</SSN>
 - c. Response 2
 - i. <Name> Doe, John </Name>
 - ii. <Case>2017CR000001</Case>
 - iii. <SSN>No Match</SSN>
 - d. Response 3
 - i. <Name> Doe, John </Name>
 - ii. <Case>2017CR000001</Case>
 - iii. <SSN>Not Available</SSN>

2.5.2.3 XML Schema

Please see Appendix B for an XML schema of the court record response.

2.6 Bulk Distribution

When possible and permissible, court shall provide a bulk file extract of Court Record data that will include the elements defined in the <u>Data Dictionary</u>. By providing data in bulk, the Court will reduce the burden to Court Clerks, Court Online Services, and ensure accurate and complete information is available.

2.6.1 Access and Delivery Methods

Access to Bulk Distribution files shall be provided through a Secure FTP or Download Link to ensure reliable transmission of data in a secure manner.

2.6.2 Authentication of Users

When required by Court jurisdiction, Bulk Distribution Users shall be authenticated in a manner consistent with Industry Standards either through a formal registration method or a contractual relationship with the court. Please reference Section 3. Court Access Authentication and Accreditation for more details

2.6.3 Bulk Files Provided

To ensure the consistent delivery of accurate information and enable Users to maintain accurate records, the court shall provide Court Records in one of the following manners.

2.6.3.1 Full File Replacement

The court shall provide a Full File replacement of all court records authorized for release. This shall include all Filings and Disposed records for the entire time period available within the court system.

Inclusion of Disposed or Closed records will allow Users to evaluate the full court record and proceed as needed.

Inclusion of open Filings will indicate to Users that additional actions should be taken to retrieve the current Case information and ensure that any potential risk is identified before an action is taken that indicates no risk associated with the individual under investigation

There are known instances in which a potential sexual predator was applying to a volunteer coach position while under investigation for child abuse allegations in a jurisdiction that does not release Filings. The applicant was 'cleared' to work with children until the Filing was discovered at a later date.

2.6.4 Incremental Files

When the availability of a Full File Replacement is not available, the court shall provide an incremental update files that will indicate Add, Change, and Delete operations to maintain an accurate record.

Many Courts provide just Adds & Deletes files. In this way, the User will process all Delete files first and then Add files to insert any new or updated information into the User system.

To ensure completeness of records, a Full Historical file should be provided at the beginning of relationship with the Court. When possible, Full Historical files shall be provided at a regular intervals or upon request to ensure completeness and accuracy of data in the Users' systems.

2.6.5 Expungement Notifications

The Court shall provide Expungement Notification to <u>Users on a daily basis but not longer than</u> <u>monthly</u> basis. The frequency should be as frequent as possible so that Users are able to identify and remove any records that should be sealed or expungement as quickly as possible.

Minimal case information shall be provided in the Expungement Notifications so that Users may accurately and quickly identify targeted records for removal while maintaining the confidentiality of the Subject of the Expungement.

This information shall not be used for any other reason than removal of records.

3. Court Access Authentication and Accreditation

Court Record data should be accessible in a secure manner that allows for the review of case information while maintaining Privacy Controls as define by the local jurisdiction. Secure access should be granted through commercially reasonable Authentication methods. If Privacy Controls restrict the availability of Sensitive Personally Identifiable Information (PII), an Accreditation process to Authenticate and confirm Permissible Purpose should be available to users which in turn would grant more access.

3.1 Authentication Requirements

Court Record data that is available to the General Public should not require a username or password to access information. Information available through this method should be as expansive as possible. For information that is restricted from General Public access, Users should be authenticated and accredited

to verify their role and associated access levels. Users should subscribe to the access system and provide information to verify their identity. Users are then assigned a login account.

3.2 Authentication Process

If Authentication is required for court access, Credential process should follow industry standard registration methods. A simple user interface on the front page of the Court Website or API documentation page. Information such as Username, Contact Details, Company Name, Permissible Use (for restricted data access), and Password Reset or Recovery Instructions should be presented in a clear and concise way.

4. Other Requirements

4.1 Case Record Verification Requirements

To enable high-volume Users the ability to verify the current status or updated details of case record, a persistent URL should be available. This direct case record URL will minimize the impact on court website by reducing the volume of queries, page rendering, and transactions upon Court's backend database or court record platforms.

4.2 Security Requirements

Minimum Technical Requirements:

- 1. Encryption (general public and authenticated)**
- 2. No cut and paste of workable links
- 3. No access to live data; replicated records will be used for public access
- 4. Authenticated access for access beyond general public access
- 5. Monitor bulk data transfers to identify and mitigate abuses of the system by utilizing access programs using automated methods.

**Encryption protects the integrity of the record and prevents exposure to potential security risks. It also prevents authenticated users with higher access from sending links to information to non-authorized users.

4.3 Expungement Information

As it is in the best interest of the Consumer, the Courts and the Background Screening Industry, there should be a consistent and practical manner in which the courts are able to provide notice of expungement status for cases. As case information, especially historical or closed case information may exist in many different repositories, from private to court repositories, that is often a time delay between the court expungement order and when it is removed from all areas that the record may exist. Also, the Date of Removal by the court may be different than when the Judge orders the expungement. Within a case record, the expungement order may apply to the entire case or individual charges, the notice should clearly identify the level of expungement and when applicable, the charge specified.

4.3.1 Proposed Expungement Notification Process

Depending upon the method that the Court provides case information, whether bulk distribution, online access, or on-premise retrieval, the case information will be retained in repositories outside of the Court control. An electronic notice in a format that is machine readable will enable efficient and timely suppression of any case information as directed by the Expungement Order.

A daily bulk file that identifies the person and case information is required to facilitate this operation. The following is proposed standard file layout for expungement notifications.

If the bulk file is not available on a daily basis, then a weekly or monthly (at a minimum) frequency shall be available.

Data Element	Data Definition
State	State of which the court resides
Court_Name	Name of court or jurisdiction that released final case information
Defendant Name	Defendant's name in last, first, middle, suffix format.
Case_Number	Case Number under which it was reported
Charge_Number	Charge Number for which expungement order applies

4.3.2 Expungement Data Dictionary

Charge_Description	Charge as originally reported
Expungement_Indicator	Indicator that shows if expungement order applies to entire case or only at a charge level.
Expungement_Date	Date when Expungement Order was granted by Court

4.4 Business Rules

Condition	Applied Rule
Expungements	Remove from data set or website. Additionally, please send email notification when this occurs.
Special Condition Cases Under State Laws	Remove from data set or website. Additionally, please send email notification when this occurs.
Special Characters	Remove and replace with a space.
Full DOB Verification	Provide a verification service when full DOB or SSN is not provided in the result set.
Concealed cases with victims as minors	Release result sets with minor information redacted.
Accredited Entities Access Purposes	Allow access to additional personally identifiable information to accredited entities. (Including employment, volunteer, tenant screening, credit, membership, & insurance underwriting)

Appendix A: Glossary

< Define all the terms necessary to properly interpret the SRS, including acronyms and abbreviations. You may wish to build a separate glossary that spans multiple projects or the entire organization, and just include terms specific to a single project in each SRS.>

- CRA
 - Consumer Reporting Agency per definition of FCRA
- Data Provider
 - The entity providing access to system of record for Court records
- Clerk/Administrator
 - Representative of Court administration or Clerk of Courts.
- API
 - Application Program Interface.
 - Set of routines, protocols, and tools for building software applications.

Appendix B: XML Schema

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