Every American jurisdiction in which you may practice law after graduation from law school requires each applicant for admission to the bar to meet character and fitness requirements as a condition of eligibility for admission. A character and fitness review will require truthful, accurate and complete reporting of all requested information related to past conduct that bar examiners may deem relevant to one’s fitness to practice law, in most jurisdictions including (but not limited to) all criminal arrests, charges, plea agreements, convictions, or instances of being taken into custody, as a juvenile or adult; all traffic violations except minor parking citations; involvement as a party to civil litigation; acts of fraud, dishonesty or lack of candor; educational discipline or misconduct; failure to pay financial obligations; and substance abuse. Many jurisdictions require disclosure of all criminal arrests, charges, plea agreements or convictions, as a juvenile or adult, even where the record has been expunged.

It should be noted, however, that while bar admission boards require a complete disclosure of requested information, in many instances past relevant conduct, particularly if isolated and/or not recent, has not resulted in denial or delay of admission to the bar in a particular jurisdiction of interest. (This is not to suggest or predict how any jurisdiction’s bar admissions board would respond to any applicant’s particular conduct disclosures going forward.)

A failure to truthfully, accurately and completely respond to a character and fitness inquiry, however, is commonly deemed a character and fitness violation in and of itself, and may be more detrimental to bar admission prospects than the undisclosed or incorrectly disclosed underlying conduct.

You are encouraged to determine the character and fitness requirements of the jurisdiction(s) where you intend to practice law. If you are uncertain where you will practice law, you may wish to review the Standard NCBE Character and Fitness Application, titled Request for Preparation of a Character Report, of the National Conference of Bar Examiners, which is used by a number of jurisdictions’ bar admission authorities. Addresses for all relevant agencies are available at www.ncbex.org.