FOR RELEASE: November 24, 2026 (Updated)

“Released Is Not the Same as Cleared”: Man Arrested by Mistake Launches autoerase.org, a Free Site That Helps People Check Their Arrest Records and Ask to Clear Them

Twelve years after a mistaken-identity arrest led Charles Belk to start the #AutoErase™ campaign, his free site works in 11 languages and turns a visitor’s concern into a records request, a clearing request or a letter to their own legislators in minutes



Charles Belk handcuffed on a Greater Los Angeles curb, Aug. 22, 2014. Photo courtesy of Charles Belk

LOS ANGELES — November 24, 2026 (Updated) — On August 22, 2014, Charles Belk was handcuffed on a Greater Los Angeles curb for a crime he had nothing to do with. On his way to a pre-Emmy event, he was stopped by police searching for a bank robbery suspect because he “fit the description” of a tall, bald Black man. He was held about six hours on $100,000 bail and released without charges. The department said it deeply regretted the inconvenience to him. The arrest record remained until something was done about it. On November 20, Belk, the entertainment industry executive, producer and active citizen behind the national #AutoErase™ campaign, launched autoerase.org, a free website that shows anyone whether their arrest record should clear itself, and what to do if it doesn’t.

“Being released is not the same as being cleared,” said Belk. “I walked out of that jail without a single charge against me, and I still had an arrest record. Seven states have passed laws from the #AutoErase effort since then, but in too many states the innocent person still has to do the clearing. autoerase.org shows you in minutes whether your record should clear itself, and if it doesn’t, exactly who may be able to help.”

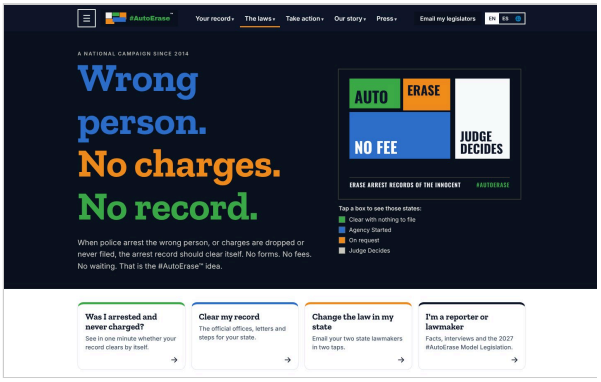
Anyone can fit a description. Anyone can be arrested. More than 10 million Americans had an arrest record but no conviction in 2019, according to the Clean Slate Initiative, and a 2026 Clean Slate Initiative report estimated $44.7 billion a year in lost earnings associated with those records. Many people released with no charges have no idea whether that record still follows them into background checks for jobs, housing and school. Clearing a record yourself can cost $400 to $4,000 for a lawyer, plus court fees that generally run $100 to $400, according to the legal guide LawInfo, and it can take several months for every agency to process the order, according to FindLaw. autoerase.org is built for everyone still living in states where that burden falls on the innocent person, and for every family still paying for a mistake that was never theirs.

“For eleven years I kept working on this bill because one man’s mistaken arrest exposed a problem that touches every community,” said South Carolina Rep. John King (D-York), who carried #AutoErase legislation from 2015 until South Carolina’s Act 248 became law this June. “But a law

only works the way it was designed to if people know about it. autoerase.org tells South Carolinians, and everyone else, exactly what to ask for and whom to ask."

The launch comes as lawmakers in Texas, Arizona, Nevada, Arkansas and other states begin filing bills for their 2027 sessions. "This is when bills get written," said Belk. "If your state doesn't clear these records automatically, now is the time to ask your legislators to file the 2027 #AutoErase Model Legislation, and autoerase.org lets you do that in 5 to 10 minutes."

Among autoerase.org's features:



The autoerase.org home page: wrong person, no charges, no record. Screenshot courtesy of #AutoErase

- **Change the law in your state.** Email your own two state lawmakers in minutes. Add a one-page briefing that compares your state's law with the 2027 #AutoErase Model Legislation. Sign up for email updates on bills in your state.
- **Is my record cleared? Find out in about a minute.** Answer three questions, or describe what happened in your own words, and get your state's answer. Every state and D.C. has its own page naming its law and the official offices.
- **An AI helper that shows its work.** Ask #AutoErase answers from the campaign's 50-state research, names the law it relied on, and says how sure it is (High, Medium or Low) and why; when it is unsure, it sends you to free legal aid. Give it your ZIP code and it finds your county court clerk and legal aid. You can type or simply talk with it.
- **A private plan, no account needed.** A private link keeps track of what you sent, to whom and when, with calendar reminders and a ready follow-up letter if an office doesn't answer. Snap a photo of your papers and AI fills in the step; the photo is never kept.
- **Clean up background checks.** Ready-to-send dispute letters for the 34 background-check companies on the federal CFPB list, plus opt-out links for people-search sites and removal requests for booking-photo websites.

Free, no sign-in, in 11 languages, on any phone.

autoerase.org also offers a 50-state map, hearing testimony for lawmakers, an anonymous story wall and a reporters' corner.

In **28*** states, at least some arrests that don't end in a conviction now clear with nothing to file.

Belk has worked with lawmakers across the country, and seven states have passed laws from the #AutoErase effort: North Carolina, the first, in 2015, followed by Illinois, Colorado, Rhode Island, Kansas, Missouri and, in June of this year, South Carolina.

"We all can make a difference!" said Belk. "autoerase.org lets anyone, in 11 languages, be the one person who makes that call, sends that email or tells their story. That is how laws change!"

autoerase.org provides general information, not legal advice.

Interviews: Charles Belk is available by video or phone, any day, and in person, with travel and expenses covered by the host. Book an interview at autoerase.org/media.

Photos, video and captions: autoerase.org/media (the 2014 curb photo, the headshot, screenshots of the site and two videos, the autoerase.org Overview and the autoerase.org Site Demo, with captions and credit lines). The autoerase.org Press Kit, with high-resolution photos, the headshot, screenshots, logos, captions and credits, is at autoerase.org/presskit.

About #AutoErase The #AutoErase campaign is a national effort founded, funded and managed by Charles Belk after his 2014 mistaken-identity arrest. It calls for arrest records to be erased automatically, at no cost, when an arrest does not end in a conviction. Seven states have passed laws from the campaign's work, and its 2027 #AutoErase Model Legislation is free for any state to adopt. Learn more and take action at autoerase.org.

About Charles Belk Charles Belk is a semi-retired entertainment industry executive, producer and active citizen from Durham, North Carolina. A USC electrical engineering graduate, he has given more than 300 speeches and presentations, testified before state legislatures, and spoken at three NAACP National Conventions and an NSBE National Convention. He was a 2016 finalist for the Ford Freedom Unsung Award. Learn more at charlesbelk.com.

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AutoErase is a trademark of Charles Belk.

**Florida qualifies under Fla. Stat. § 943.0595: automatic sealing since 2019, with court files closed too since 2023.*

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