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Anne Arundel County Food Bank

Baltimore Jewish Council

Behavioral Health System Baltimore

Bridges to Housing Stability

CASH Campaign of Maryland

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Episcopal Diocese of Maryland

Family League of Baltimore

Fuel Fund of Maryland

Job Opportunities Task Force

Laurel Advocacy & Referral Services,
Inc.

League of Women Voters of Maryland

Loyola University Maryland

Maryland Center on Economic Policy

Maryland Community Action
Partnership

Maryland Family Network

Maryland Food Bank

Maryland Hunger Solutions

Paul's Place

St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore

Welfare Advocates

Marylanders Against Poverty

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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 11

Criminal Procedure – Partial Expungement

House Judiciary Committee

March 28, 2024 1pm

Submitted by Mark Huffman, Co-Chair

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) strongly supports SB 11, which would ensure that the Maryland criminal justice system is equipped with the appropriate technology to allow for partial expungements.

The number of Americans with a criminal history is on the rise. More than one-third of the adult working-age population has a criminal record. According to the National Employment Law Project, 1 in 3 Americans (70 million) have an arrest record that will appear in a routine criminal background check in hiring. Nearly 1.5 million Marylanders struggle to secure employment with a criminal record. This challenge falls disproportionately on black and brown communities, the poor, and the homeless. Criminal records can serve as both the cause and consequence of poverty. Workers and job seekers with a criminal background apply for jobs for which they are well qualified but are not considered due to criminal records. Technological advances have made access to criminal background information easier, which creates often insurmountable barriers to obtaining employment, housing, education, and other critical resources. It is well established that black men and women are more likely to be arrested and convicted than white men and women; and will be more likely than their white counterparts to have a criminal record. The impact of a criminal record is exacerbated among Black workers, who already experience racial discrimination in the labor market. Studies have found that even black job seekers without a criminal record are less likely to receive a job call back for an interview than white job seekers with a criminal record.

In an era of rising childcare costs, ballooning health care costs, the ever increasing housing and rental markets, and prohibitively expense costs of higher education, having a well-paying job is a necessity. The days where financial freedom was accessible to a significant portion of Marylanders are long gone, and the percentage of Marylanders who can hope for even short term financial security is dwindling. Taking away the ability of Marylanders to access gainful employment will exacerbate every single issue that Maryland is struggling with, especially homelessness and public safety. When Marylanders cannot support themselves the only outcome is the deterioration of its people and the state as a whole. This is not a potential outcome; this is an inevitability.

In the past, the criminal justice system could be distilled to one phrase “You do the crime, you do the time.” The time was limited based on the nature of the offense. Once you completed your sentence and paid your debt to society you were freed. There is no completing the sentence now. In 2024, anyone can access anyone’s criminal records in a smartphone within seconds. Easily accessible criminal records mean that for impoverished individuals, once you finish your time in incarceration, your true sentence is only just beginning. And for thousands of Marylanders, that sentence is a lifetime of hardship and struggle which can be traced back to an inability to support themselves.

There is no reason to needlessly increase the burden on these Marylanders. Having just the inexpungible offenses on Marylanders' records is more than enough to ensure they face the consequences for their choices. Preventing eligible offenses from being expunged as well is needlessly cruel. It provides a negligible amount of increased accountability while being a significant hindrance for individuals to actually turn their lives around and refrain from the same actions that led to their incarceration in the first place. This helps no one but hurts everyone.

MAP appreciates your consideration and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for SB 11.

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.