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## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 499

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The Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy (GOCPP) advises the Governor on criminal justice strategies, coordinates across public safety agencies, and advances policies that promote justice and public safety. By expanding access to criminal record expungement and prohibiting the public display of certain records on Maryland Judiciary Case Search, House Bill 499 will expand opportunities for returning citizens to successfully reintegrate into society and thereby improve public safety.

A criminal record is a barrier to economic stability for many people. Research has long shown that the presence of a record imposes challenges to obtaining steady employment, secure housing, and educational opportunities; this lack of stability heightens the risk of recidivism, further perpetuating cycles of poverty, crime, and justice system involvement.<sup>1</sup> What's more, this issue disproportionately impacts communities – such as the Black community – who are more likely to have justice system involvement, exacerbating racial disparities across the State.<sup>2</sup>

Expungement allows people to progress without the stigma of a past conviction hindering their opportunities. Research indicates those who receive expungements experience a **23% increase in wages within a year**, driven primarily by their ability to obtain stable employment. What's more, a Cato Institute study found that **recidivism rates among expungement recipients are lower than those of the general population**; in essence, the data indicates that expungement benefits both **personal rehabilitation** and **community safety**.<sup>3</sup>

Despite what the research tells us, systemic barriers to expungement remain in place in the State. Lengthy waiting periods, restrictive eligibility requirements, and the widespread availability of outdated or inaccurate criminal records on public and commercial databases create burdensome roadblocks for individuals seeking this type of relief. These procedural hurdles can dissuade

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<sup>1</sup> <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/expungement-criminal-records-reentry-barriers>

<sup>2</sup>

<https://marylandmatters.org/2024/06/18/advocates-welcome-cannabis-pardons-but-urge-moore-to-continue-justice-reform-efforts/>  
/ (A racial equity impact note for the 2022 referendum that ultimately legalized recreational cannabis use noted Black people accounted for 59% of those arrested for marijuana possession in 2020, compared to about 39% for white people. Those convictions often result in hardships in getting a job, finding affordable housing and other economic challenges.)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cato.org/regulation/summer-2020/power-clean-slate>

otherwise eligible candidates from even attempting to have their records expunged.<sup>4</sup> Fortunately, House Bill 499 proposes solutions to counter these obstacles.

First, HB499 will allow individuals who completed their probation or parole to be eligible for expungement even if they had a technical violation. Second, it expands the list of expungeable offenses, aligning Maryland law with modern research demonstrating expungement's economic and social benefits. House Bill 499 also eliminates the public display of certain records on Maryland Judiciary Case Search, protecting individuals from the harm caused by inaccurate, incomplete, and monetized criminal record data. Finally, the Bill ensures fairness in the expungement process, recognizing that individuals who have made good-faith efforts to fulfill restitution obligations should not be indefinitely denied relief due to financial hardship.

These reforms are not only just—they will foster economic opportunities, reduce recidivism, and strengthen communities. Expungement is a proven tool for breaking down systemic barriers to reentry, allowing countless citizens to contribute more fully to the State's economy and society. For these reasons, GOCPP requests a **favorable report** on House Bill 499. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cato.org/regulation/summer-2020/power-clean-slate>