

Testimony in Support of HB0499
Expungement Reform Act of 2025
Submitted by: Melody Mitchell

My name is Melody Mitchell, and I am here today to express my strong support for HB0499, the Expungement Reform Act of 2025. This bill is crucial for individuals like myself who have worked hard to rehabilitate and move forward, yet continue to be penalized by an outdated and unjust system that permanently brands people for past mistakes.

Under current Maryland law, many individuals remain ineligible for expungement, even after serving their sentences and demonstrating genuine rehabilitation. One of the most glaring injustices is the precedent set by the Abhishek Case, in which a man was permanently denied expungement due to a conviction for cannabis possession a substance that is now fully legal in Maryland. Despite waiting the required 10 years and serving his full sentence, Mr. Abhishek remains ineligible to clear his record. How is this justice?

My own experience highlights similar flaws in the current system. I have a violation of probation for a technicality. I served the remainder of my sentence, and neither my original charge nor the violation was violent. Yet, due to this single probation violation, I am now barred from expunging multiple other misdemeanor charges from my record. Who benefits from this system? Certainly not individuals like me who are trying to better themselves. This practice does more harm than good, creating lasting barriers that prevent successful reintegration into society.

The consequences of a criminal record extend far beyond the courtroom. It impacts nearly every aspect of life—housing, employment, and education. Studies show that individuals with a criminal record are 50% less likely to receive a callback for a job interview compared to those without one. The unemployment rate for formerly incarcerated individuals is nearly 27%, five times higher than the general population. Without the ability to secure stable employment, many people are forced to rely on public assistance, further straining state resources.

Additionally, access to education becomes extremely difficult. Many colleges and professional programs impose strict restrictions on applicants with criminal records, limiting their ability to gain the skills necessary for high-paying jobs. In my case, I was unable to enroll in medical school solely because of my record. Despite my efforts to rehabilitate and move forward, I continue to face closed doors due to mistakes I have already paid for.

Probation violations are often used as a loophole to extend sentences far beyond what is just. In my case, a charge that carried a maximum sentence of six months resulted in a five year probation term. Then, after if successfully completing those five years, I am required to wait an additional five years before even being considered for expungement. In reality, I have been serving a tenyear sentence for a six-month misdemeanor a non-violent offense. Worse still, if I had received a simple traffic ticket during my probation, I would have been permanently barred from clearing my record. How does this make sense?

If you commit a federal offense, depending on the job, your record may never be considered. Yet, for state level misdemeanor convictions, Maryland holds people hostage to their past, denying them access to employment, housing, and education. This contradiction highlights the deep flaws in our current expungement laws.

HB0499 is a necessary reform. This bill would:

Overturn the Abhishek Decision, ensuring that individuals are not permanently barred from expungement due to outdated laws.

Add seven charges to the expungement list, allowing more people to clear their records and move forward with their lives.

Remove all marijuana convictions from Case Search, reflecting the reality that cannabis is now legal in Maryland.

The goal of our justice system should be rehabilitation, not lifelong punishment. It is said that once you have served your sentence, you are free but are you really? For many, the stigma of a record follows them for life, making true freedom and reintegration nearly impossible. Studies have shown that individuals who are given a second chance through expungement have lower recidivism rates and are more likely to contribute positively to their communities. This bill is not just about fairness it is about creating opportunities, strengthening our workforce, and reducing the burden on public assistance programs.

I urge you to vote in favor of HB0499. This legislation is critical to ensuring that individuals who have paid their debts to society are given a real chance to succeed. Expungement reform is long overdue, and this bill is a step toward a more just and effective legal system.

Thank you for your time and consideration.