

HB499 Expungement Reform Act of 2025
HEARING BEFORE THE SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
3/4/2025

POSITION: FAVORABLE

Shore Legal Access (formerly Mid-Shore Pro Bono) supports SB432. This bill would reverse the adverse impacts of the Abhishek case that prohibits expungement where there has been a violation of probation, reduce waiting time, expand the kinds of records that can be expunged, and remove from public view cannabis possession charges already pardoned by the Governor. These reforms would significantly expand access to clearing criminal records, save valuable legal services resources, and increase opportunities for housing, employment, service, and educational opportunities for all Marylanders. The success and efficacy of Maryland's groundbreaking work to expand access to criminal record expungement would advance significantly through HB499.

Shore Legal Access (SLA) connects people on the Eastern Shore with limited financial means to legal representation and essential community resources. Each year, SLA helps over 3,800 people in our community access the legal system when they would otherwise be shut out. Our small legal team and network of volunteer lawyers provide free legal services for eviction prevention, criminal record expungement, life and estate planning, family law, foreclosure, and consumer debt. These services help families gain financial and housing stability and create safe, secure homes for children.

SLA is a provider of legal representation for criminal record expungement cases in 8 Eastern Shore counties (Caroline, Dorchester, Queen Anne's, Somerset, Talbot, Wicomico, and Worcester). Since Maryland's law changed to expand access to criminal record expungement and decriminalize cannabis, SLA has assisted over 1,000 people on the Eastern Shore with criminal record expungement.



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Our volunteer attorneys provide the necessary research and document preparation required to file an expungement petition. It is a common situation that our clients have completed their sentence and meet all other requirements, but have had a minor violation of probation, such as failure to pay a fee or file a change of address. These clients are currently prohibited from getting their record expunged. This bill would ensure that people who have already completed their sentence and remained crime-free can clear their record. The bill would also add several misdemeanors to the list of expungement eligible offenses, such as driving without a license, significantly expanding the number of people who can clear their record. SLA's clients would greatly benefit from this bill, such as Wayne* who sought assistance to clear a conviction for writing a bad check that has been on his record for 26 years so that he could secure better employment opportunities.

On the Eastern Shore, we have a disproportionately large number of people involved with the criminal justice system, particularly in Dorchester, Wicomico, Worcester, and Somerset Counties where the rate of incarceration is more than twice the state average. Our communities would benefit from having a stronger workforce and greater economic and social opportunities.

SLA supports HB499 and urges the Committee's favorable recommendation on this bill. If you have any questions regarding our position, please contact Meredith Girard, Executive Director at 410.690.8128 or e-mail mgirard@shorelegal.org.

*Not client's actual name to protect confidentiality

