

MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



351 Dubois Rd, Annapolis, MD 21401

Written Testimony in Support of: HB 499 The Expungement Reform Act of 2025

Dear Chairman and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

I write to you today on behalf of the Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform, a nonprofit, nonpartisan, grassroots advocacy organization that believes in second chances and in the fundamental fairness of our justice system. The Expungement Reform Act of 2025 (House Bill 499/Senate Bill 432) presents a long-overdue opportunity to address the unnecessary and lifelong barriers that prevent individuals with past convictions from moving forward.

For many Marylanders, a criminal record—regardless of how old or minor—acts as a permanent roadblock to securing employment, housing, and financial stability. Even after serving their sentences, these individuals remain trapped in a cycle of poverty and marginalization. This legislation offers a chance to break that cycle by refining the expungement process and eliminating outdated restrictions that unfairly penalize individuals who have already paid their debt to society.

A criminal record does not just serve as a reminder of past mistakes—it creates a nearly insurmountable barrier to rebuilding a stable and successful life. Employers frequently reject qualified applicants due to background checks, landlords deny housing opportunities, and financial institutions refuse credit and loans to individuals with records. This systemic exclusion prevents people from truly moving on and contributing productively to their communities. If serving time is meant to be a form of justice, then it should also provide a clean slate upon completion, allowing individuals a fair opportunity to reintegrate and rebuild their lives.

The existing expungement framework, as interpreted by the courts, disproportionately impacts those who may have committed minor probation violations. Under the current standard, a person who successfully serves their time and meets all other eligibility requirements can still be denied expungement for something as small as missing an appointment or struggling with an addiction-related relapse. This rigid interpretation fails to account for the complexities of rehabilitation and disproportionately harms low-income individuals and communities of color.

By ensuring that a probation violation does not automatically render a person permanently ineligible for expungement, House Bill 499 restores fairness and consistency to the legal system. It acknowledges that mistakes happen, that growth is possible, and that individuals should not be defined indefinitely by their lowest moments.

This bill does not eliminate the role of judicial discretion—prosecutors and victims will still have the right to object to expungements when appropriate. What it does is provide a pathway for

those who have genuinely rehabilitated and are seeking to reintegrate into society. This is not just a matter of justice; it is an economic and public safety issue. Studies have consistently shown that individuals with access to expungement are more likely to find stable employment, contribute to the economy, and avoid recidivism.

It is time we recognize that true rehabilitation means more than just serving time—it means allowing people to fully participate in society without being haunted by past mistakes. For these reasons, we strongly urge you to support House Bill 499 and issue a favorable report.

Sincerely,

Crystal Francis, Ph.D., Vice President
Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform
Backdoor@ma4jr.org
(443) 692-7228

The Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR) is a nonpartisan, all-volunteer organization of nearly 2000 Marylanders who advocate for sensible evidence-based legislative and policy changes in Maryland's correctional practices. MAJR thanks you for the opportunity to provide input on this legislation and urges a favorable report.