

**Department of Legislative Services**  
 Maryland General Assembly  
 2025 Session

**FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE**  
**First Reader**

Senate Bill 514 (Senator Henson)  
 Judicial Proceedings

**Landlord and Tenant - Residential Leases - Prospective Tenant Criminal History  
 Records Check (Maryland Fair Chance Housing Act)**

This bill generally establishes certain restrictions on a landlord’s use of a prospective tenant’s criminal history records, in addition to other prohibitions. Among other provisions, the bill also (1) reduces, from seven years to three years, the applicable period of criminal history included in a reusable tenant screening report and (2) mandates the data collection and annual publication of related complaint information by the Office of the Attorney General (OAG). Violation of the bill is an unfair, abusive, or deceptive trade practice under the Maryland Consumer Protection Act (MCPA), generally subject to MCPA’s enforcement and civil penalty provisions; a violator is subject to a maximum \$1,000 civil penalty for each violation.

**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** General fund expenditures for OAG increase by \$283,400 in FY 2026. Future year expenditures reflect annualization, inflation, and elimination of one-time programming costs. The bill’s imposition of civil penalties may minimally increase special fund revenues (not reflected below).

(in dollars)	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	283,400	251,000	262,100	273,700	285,400
Net Effect	(\$283,400)	(\$251,000)	(\$262,100)	(\$273,700)	(\$285,400)

*Note: ( ) = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate increase; (-) = indeterminate decrease*

**Local Effect:** The bill does not have a material impact on local government finances or operations.

**Small Business Effect:** Meaningful

## Analysis

### Bill Summary:

#### *Definitions*

A “conditional offer” is an offer to lease residential property to a prospective tenant, contingent upon a subsequent inquiry into the prospective tenant’s criminal history or any other lawful eligibility criteria the landlord may lawfully utilize.

#### *Tenant History and Records Check – Generally*

The bill prohibits a landlord from (1) requiring a prospective tenant to submit to a drug or alcohol test or (2) requesting or requiring a prospective tenant to consent to the release of information about the individual from a drug abuse or alcohol abuse facility.

A landlord is also prohibited from rejecting a prospective tenant based on the following:

- an arrest or charge that did not result in a conviction;
- an expunged conviction;
- a conviction for which a full pardon was granted;
- a vacated or otherwise legally nullified conviction;
- a juvenile delinquency adjudication; or
- a sealed record, as specified.

A landlord that conducts a criminal history records check (CHRC) must do so for every prospective tenant. Before accepting an application fee, a landlord must provide a prospective tenant with written notice regarding the use of criminal history in leasing decisions. This notice must include a statement that a conviction for specified crimes may be considered only after a conditional offer is extended. The landlord must also provide the prospective tenant with information on the ability of the prospective tenant to provide evidence of inaccuracies in the criminal history records, evidence of rehabilitation, and any mitigating factors. Additionally, the landlord must notify the prospective tenant that an individualized assessment will be conducted.

#### *Conditional Offer and Review*

Before extending a conditional offer to a prospective tenant, a landlord is prohibited from (1) requesting or requiring the prospective tenant to disclose in a housing application whether the tenant has a criminal history or has been accused or charged with any crimes or (2) making any inquiry regarding the prospective tenant’s criminal history. However, a

landlord may require information regarding whether a prospective tenant has been convicted of manufacturing methamphetamine on the premises of federally assisted housing or is subject to a lifetime registration requirement under a state sex offender registration program.

In response to the results of a CHRC, a prospective tenant may provide, and a landlord must then consider, evidence of (1) any inaccuracies in the prospective tenant's criminal history records; (2) rehabilitation; and (3) any other mitigating factors.

After extending a conditional offer to a prospective tenant, a landlord may only consider the following convictions as potential grounds for withdrawing the offer:

- first-degree murder;
- human trafficking;
- any crime resulting in lifetime registration in a state sex offender registry; and,
- if the conviction occurred within three years immediately preceding the conditional offer (1) a sexual offense under Title 3, Subtitle 3 of the Criminal Law Article; (2) child pornography under § 11-207 of the Criminal Law Article; (3) kidnapping under § 3-502 of the Criminal Law Article; and (4) arson under §§ 6-102 and 6-103 of the Criminal Law Article.

A landlord may withdraw a conditional offer based on a prospective tenant's CHRC only if the landlord determines the withdrawal is necessary to protect a substantial, legitimate, and nondiscriminatory interest. If a landlord withdraws a conditional offer, the landlord is required to provide the prospective tenant with written notice that includes the specific reason for the withdrawal and a statement that the prospective tenant may appeal the withdrawal by providing specified evidence to the landlord.

A landlord's reassessment of a rental application after a prospective tenant's appeal must consider (1) the nature and severity of the offense; (2) the applicant's age at the time of the offense; (3) the time elapsed since the offense; (4) evidence of rehabilitation and good conduct; (5) the degree to which a recurrence of the offense would negatively impact the safety or property of other tenants; and (6) whether the offense occurred on or was connected to property previously rented or leased by the prospective tenant.

Within 30 days of receiving notice of a conditional offer's withdrawal, the prospective tenant may request a copy of all information the landlord considered, including criminal history records. The landlord must reply within 10 days to a timely request.

### *Additional Provisions Regarding Landlords and the Use of Criminal History Records*

Landlords are prohibited from knowingly or intentionally publishing (or causing to be published) any advertisement that expressly states a policy of excluding prospective tenants based on arrest or conviction records. Additional prohibitions are specified in the bill, including using a prospective tenant's criminal history for a purpose inconsistent with the bill.

A landlord's decision regarding the leasing of a residential dwelling unit, whether based on an individual's criminal history or the absence of a CHRC, must not constitute grounds for legal action against the landlord.

### *Office of the Attorney General*

The bill requires that OAG develop and publish on its website a model notice for landlords. This model notice must be available in specified languages and include:

- language for advising prospective tenants of a conditional offer withdrawal or adverse housing action taken based on criminal history; and
- language that informs prospective tenants of the right to (1) request a copy of all information relied upon by the landlord (including criminal history records); (2) file a complaint under MCPA; and (3) any other information deemed appropriate by the Attorney General.

OAG must collect and maintain the following data on complaints filed under the bill: the number of complaints; complainant demographics (including sex and race); landlord names associated with complaints; the number of investigations conducted; and the disposition of each complaint.

Annually, OAG must publish and post on its website information regarding substantiated complaints resulting in civil penalties under the bill's provisions. The bill prohibits the publication of any identifying information about a landlord subject to a complaint if the landlord is in good faith compliance with requirements imposed under the bill. OAG must adopt regulations to carry out the bill's provisions.

### **Current Law:**

#### *Reusable Tenant Screening Report*

Pursuant to §8-218 of the Real Property Article, a "reusable tenant screening report" is a report prepared within the previous 30 days by a consumer reporting agency at the request and expense of a prospective tenant and made directly available to a prospective landlord

at no charge for use during the rental application process. A reusable tenant screening report must contain specified information, including – for each jurisdiction indicated as a prior residence of the prospective tenant, regardless of whether the residence is reported by the prospective tenant or by a consumer reporting agency preparing a consumer report – a comprehensive CHRC for all federal, state, and local charges against and convictions of the prospective tenant over the previous seven years. (The bill decreases the period from seven years to three years.)

*Consumer Protection*

An unfair, abusive, or deceptive trade practice under MCPA includes, among other acts, any false, falsely disparaging, or misleading oral or written statement, visual description, or other representation of any kind which has the capacity, tendency, or effect of deceiving or misleading consumers. The prohibition against engaging in any unfair, abusive, or deceptive trade practice encompasses the offer for or actual sale, lease, rental, loan, or bailment of any consumer goods, consumer realty, or consumer services; the extension of consumer credit; the collection of consumer debt; or the offer for or actual purchase of consumer goods or consumer realty from a consumer by a merchant whose business includes paying off consumer debt in connection with the purchase of any consumer goods or consumer realty from a consumer.

The Consumer Protection Division is responsible for enforcing MCPA and investigating the complaints of aggrieved consumers. The division may attempt to conciliate the matter, issue a cease and desist order, or file a civil action in court. A merchant who violates MCPA is subject to a fine of up to \$10,000 for each violation and up to \$25,000 for each repetition of the same violation. In addition to any civil penalties that may be imposed, any person who violates MCPA is guilty of a misdemeanor and, on conviction, is subject to a fine of up to \$1,000 and/or imprisonment for up to one year.

**State Expenditures:** General fund expenditures increase for OAG by \$283,355 in fiscal 2026 for additional staff and to develop the database required under the bill. Such staff are necessary in order to bring anticipated enforcement actions against violators, promulgate regulations, and maintain the database required under the bill. This estimate therefore reflects the cost of hiring one assistant Attorney General and one administrator, in addition to one-time programming costs in fiscal 2026.

Positions	2.0
Salaries and Fringe Benefits	\$193,617
Operating Expenses	14,738
One-time Programming Costs	<u>75,000</u>
<b>Total FY 2026 State Expenditures</b>	<b>\$283,355</b>

Future years reflect full salaries with annual increases and employee turnover as well as annual increases in ongoing operating expenses and the termination of programming costs.

**Small Business Effect:** The bill may have a meaningful impact on small business landlords who are prohibited from taking specified actions, subject to penalties under MCPA.

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### **Additional Information**

**Recent Prior Introductions:** Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

**Designated Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Office of the Attorney General (Consumer Protection Division); Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts); Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - February 6, 2025  
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