

**HEALTH CARE FOR THE HOMELESS
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 589
Criminal Procedure – Partial Expungement**

**Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 19, 2020**



Health Care for the Homeless strongly supports SB 589, which would repeal the punitive ‘unit rule’ provision for non-conviction charges by allowing individuals to request the ‘partial expungement’ of eligible charges within a unit.

SB 589 helps end homelessness by reducing barriers to employment and housing. Criminal records, including records of non-convictions, create almost insurmountable barriers to obtaining employment, housing, education, and other critical resources like social safety net programs.¹ In a 2011 Health Care for the Homeless study, which surveyed 429 people who had been released from jail or prison within the past 10 years, respondents most frequently cited the inability to find work (57%) and a criminal record (56%) as the barriers preventing them from accessing stable housing.² As a supportive housing services provider, we see the direct impact that a criminal record can have on an individual’s ability to obtain housing. SB 238 serves to directly eliminate such barriers to housing.

Many individuals have lengthy records with charges that would be eligible for expungement if not for the unit rule. This bill ensures that individuals are not permanently burdened by lengthy records – many times for charges that they did not commit. This challenge falls disproportionately on Black and brown communities, the poor, and the homeless.³

SB 589 rightly recognizes that individuals should not be penalized or stigmatized for charges that should be expunged but are unable to be removed from a person’s record simply because the charges – including non-convictions-- allegedly arose from the same incident.

Health Care for the Homeless strongly supports SB 589 because it reduces barriers to employment and housing – and so is an important measure that will help reduce the incidence of homelessness. We urge a favorable report by the committee.

Health Care for the Homeless is Maryland’s leading provider of integrated health services and supportive housing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. We work to prevent and end homelessness for vulnerable individuals and families by providing quality, integrated health care and promoting access to affordable housing and sustainable incomes through direct service, advocacy, and community engagement. We deliver integrated medical care, mental health services, state-certified addiction treatment, dental care, social services, and housing support services for over 10,000 Marylanders annually at sites in Baltimore City, and in Harford, and Baltimore Counties. For more information, visit www.hchmd.org.

¹ See American Public Health Association, *Housing and Homelessness as a Public Health Issue* (Nov. 2017), available at <https://apha.org/policies-and-advocacy/public-health-policy-statements/policy-database/2018/01/18/housing-and-homelessness-as-a-public-health-issue>.

² Health Care for the Homeless, Inc., *Still serving time: struggling with homelessness, incarceration & re-entry in Baltimore* (October 2011), available at <http://www.hchmd.org/research.shtml>.

³ See The White House, *Economic Perspectives on Incarceration and the Criminal Justice System* (April 2016), available at https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/page/files/20160423_cea_incarceration_criminal_justice.pdf.