



Susan Francis  
*EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR*

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Anthony P. Ashton  
*PRESIDENT*

Michael S. Clevenger  
*VICE PRESIDENT*

Alexandria K. Montanio  
*TREASURER*

David G. Sommer  
*SECRETARY*

Kerby Baden  
Matthew M. Bryant  
Jhonell Campbell  
Richard L. Costella  
Namha Edwards  
Karen E. H. Gouline  
Robert N. Grossbart  
Kamil Ismail  
Reba Letsa  
Michelle N. Lipkowitz  
Michael March  
Amy M. McClain  
Dana W. McKee  
Penny J. Minna  
Charles J. Morton, Jr.  
Derek P. Roussillon  
Martin H. Schreiber II  
Dennis J. Shaffer  
Allison Baker Shealy  
James Tansey

MARYLAND SENATE JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS COMMITTEE  
TESTIMONY OF MARYLAND VOLUNTEER LAWYERS SERVICE  
IN SUPPORT OF SB0020: VEHICLE LAWS – CANCELED, REVOKED,  
AND SUSPENDED DRIVER’S LICENSES - PENALTIES  
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 27, 2021

Senator Carter and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 20.

My name is Christopher Sweeney and I am the Staff Attorney for the Workforce Development Project at the Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service (MVLS). MVLS is the oldest and largest provider of pro bono civil legal services to low-income Marylanders. Since MVLS’ founding in 1981, our statewide panel of over 1,700 volunteer lawyers, has provided free legal services to over 100,000 Marylanders in a wide range of civil legal matters. In FY20, MVLS volunteer and staff lawyers provided legal services to 4,459 people across the state. Through our Workforce Development project, we encounter many clients who face driver’s license suspensions and their collateral consequences. For the reasons explained below, we respectfully request a favorable report on SB20.

MVLS’ Workforce Development Project is a partnership with occupational training programs in Baltimore City, and is a continuation of the Mayor’s Office’s ‘One Baltimore for Jobs’ pilot program. The Mayor’s Office of Employment Development began One Baltimore for Jobs as a response to the civil unrest in 2015. The project supports job programs, social services programs, and legal services programs in Baltimore, and connects those programs with support from state agencies such as the Office of Child Support and the Motor Vehicle Administration. Though funding for legal services via One Baltimore for Jobs has ended, MVLS has continued its part of the project and currently supports six workforce programs in Baltimore. MVLS works with Civic Works, Job Opportunities Task Force, Jane Addams Resource Corporation, Caroline Center, Bon Secours Community Works, Biotechnical Institute of Maryland, and Helping Up Mission to provide ‘wrap-around’ services – supplementing the trainees’ social services with legal services. The goal of the program is to make participants more job-ready by reducing barriers to employment.

Each of the clients I serve through the Workforce Development Project is enrolled in courses to receive job skills training and certification in areas such as welding, machine operation, nursing, pharmacy tech, construction, and

weatherization. These non-profit programs are free to students, and are aimed at providing re-entry opportunities for those who were previously incarcerated or who simply lacked educational and employment opportunities due to the experiences of poverty. A large number of the clients MVLS serves through this program have been charged with driving on a suspended license. This is largely due to their inability to pay the fees and fines that are often required to keep their license in good standing. For a person living on the edge of poverty, trying to make ends meet, a simple infraction or missed payment can spiral into a series of fines and fees that result in a license suspension. This can force a person to decide between not driving, thereby missing work or employment opportunities, and risking the criminal penalties for driving with a suspension in order to put food on the table.

As these individuals prepare to enter the workforce and get their lives back on track, the possibility of incarceration for what ultimately amounts to an unpaid fine is a major impediment. Furthermore, the fact that driving on a suspended license even carries the possibility of incarceration means that this charge can never be expunged under our current laws, and can block otherwise eligible charges from being expunged. By lessening the penalty associated with driving on a suspended license, SB20 would provide a path forward for those seeking to re-enter the workforce and contribute to our society.

Expungement is a major element of our workforce development project, and SB20 would open up substantial possibilities for Marylanders who have been held back by past criminal charges. Maryland's current laws prevent a person from expunging a case if one or more charges within that case resulted in a guilty verdict. One exception to this rule is traffic offenses that do not carry the possibility of incarceration. By reducing the penalty for driving on a suspended license, Maryland would allow many people to move forward with their lives by expunging old charges. Letting incarceration remain an option for suspended license charges holds people back, preventing expungement and in turn preventing Marylanders from employment opportunities that would benefit them and enrich our society.

MVLS has served hundreds of clients who have been prevented from expunging cases due to the current penalties for suspended licenses. Too many clients have cases on their record that involve "more serious" charges like drug-related offenses that were dropped or adjudicated not guilty, only to be found guilty for driving on a suspended license. Current laws make these dropped charges – where a person was not found guilty – impossible to expunge due to a suspended license conviction. This unfair practice would end with the passage of SB20.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to testify. We respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 20.