

**TESTIMONY in SUPPORT of HB 957**  
**Criminal Procedure - Expungement - Felony Convictions**

**TO:** Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Moon, and members of the House Judiciary Committee  
**FROM:** Matt Parsons on behalf of Baltimore Action Legal Team

My name is Matthew Parsons, and I serve as a Community Lawyer for Baltimore Action Legal Team (BALT). I submit this testimony in favor of House Bill 957. As a community lawyer I help people navigate legal systems that directly impact them; this frequently involves providing expungement services to help clients overcome existing barriers to meeting the basic needs of them and their families.

With HB 957, you have an opportunity to respond to a legal and moral imperative regarding expungement laws and their under acknowledged impact on the community. To be clear, the core of this matter goes beyond the legislature's usual contemplation of expungement laws on paper. This issue does not merely regard the list of specific convictions deemed eligible for expungement; it involves the disproportionate harm that communities incur because of restrictions on eligible expungements. Restrictions put in place by people who are unaware of, or possibly indifferent to, these material harms to people's personal, economic, food, health, political, and community security.

Having a criminal record means you are no longer entitled to the same opportunities as those who are not branded by the criminal justice system as undesirable or unworthy. Clients often express to me that they struggle to survive, and to provide for their families, because of their record. If you have had a record, you would understand exactly how this arbitrarily affects your day-to-day life. If you have not, it means you are regularly rejected by biased employers and disregarded as a valued worker; it means you are ineligible for wraparound services such as those to help you obtain stable housing. If you cannot maintain employment, it is additionally difficult to find stable housing; if you do not have stable housing, it is then more difficult to obtain employment. Without either, poverty is imminent, and the likelihood of someone becoming a repeat offender and recidivism occurring out of economic desperation is probable.

What this bill asks is the bare minimum: It is widening, ever so slightly, the door to a new life of opportunity, self-sufficiency, and community security. To you, this may seem minute, but to impacted peoples, this may be life-changing. Remember that the existing restrictions on the length of time and subsequent convictions still pertain to these additional convictions being considered in this bill. With that said, this is an important step toward restoring equity in impacted communities. I urge a favorable report on HB 957.