

TESTIMONY in SUPPORT of SB 0138
Criminal Procedure – Expungement of Records – Expansion

TO: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
FROM: Matt Parsons on behalf of Baltimore Action Legal Team

My name is Matt Parsons, and I am the Community Lawyer at Baltimore Action Legal Team (BALT). I submit this testimony in favor of SB 0138. In my career as a community lawyer and workforce development professional, my work has involved providing legal services to community members who lack access to justice, as well as supporting the reentry process for returning citizens who seek jobs with family-sustaining wages.

Most typically, the community members whom I am helping are those who have been disenfranchised by our society, often from birth. They are mostly black and brown people who are impacted by the criminal justice system, branded with a criminal record, and too frequently, incarcerated. They are people whom the system consequently marginalizes, revoking essential economic opportunities, such as quality education and access to sustainable jobs, that ensure a life of dignity. For those with a criminal record who lack access to expungements, our system creates near-insuperable barriers to the successful reentry and self-sufficiency that it purports to encourage. At Civic Works in Baltimore, I witnessed firsthand the numerous economic struggles that returning citizens experience during the reentry process, often while serving parole or probation. More often than not, these struggles - whether related to stable housing, food access, or child support - stem from their lack of access to family-sustaining jobs. This lack of access is, in turn, the near-inevitable result of a system that withholds the same economic opportunities that more privileged members of our society freely enjoy, all because of a criminal record. In my current role as a community lawyer, I offer expungement services to community members who may be struggling to overcome the same barriers I describe. Although I have successfully helped clients expunge their records and begin with a clean slate, all too often a client is ineligible on a conviction for a seemingly arbitrary reason. The outcome is discouraging for all, the process alienating, the alleged rationale failing to appropriately reflect the individual's actual potential to build a life of dignity.

This bill is an opportunity to foster more racially equitable outcomes for community members who deserve the same opportunities for success from which they have historically been deprived. Expanding expungement eligibility to include probation before judgment and stet dispositions will not only alleviate the unjust burden of a criminal record for many, but also ensure stronger families and communities in Maryland. I urge a favorable report on SB 0138 from this committee.