

JOTF JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB0544

Department of Planning - Collateral Consequences for Individuals With Criminal Records - Study

TO: Members of the House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Christopher Dews, Policy Consultant

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The Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) is an independent, nonprofit organization that develops and advocates policies and programs to increase the skills, job opportunities, and incomes of low-skill, low-wage workers and job seekers in Maryland. We support HB0544 as a means of reducing the impact of incarceration and enhancing employment opportunities for lower-income workers and job seekers throughout the state.

A criminal record can be both the cause and consequence of poverty and has detrimental effects on the employment prospects for the [estimated 25% of working-age Marylanders with a record](#) (pg.26). Every year, approximately 15,000 Marylanders are released from state prisons and struggle to secure a job, find a place to live and reenter society. Demographically, [71% of Maryland's prison population is black](#) (pg.20), the highest in the nation, and one out of three Marylanders returning from incarceration return to Baltimore City. The Department of Justice has [found](#) high rates of recidivism among returning citizens, with half of all returning citizens recidivating within 3 years and 60 percent recidivating within 5 years. One of the primary drivers of high recidivism rates is the inability of returning citizens to find a job: [over 60 percent of formerly incarcerated persons remain unemployed](#) one year after their release. This is mainly because more than [85% of employers perform background checks on all of their job applicants](#) and deny employment to many returning citizens based on a record. A past criminal conviction of any sort reduces job offers by half. This leaves many of the 1.5 million Marylanders with a criminal record out in the cold when trying to obtain gainful employment. A 2015 Manhattan Institute study [revealed](#) that employment, especially within the first six months of release, drastically lowers the likelihood of recidivism for nonviolent offenders.

Unfortunately, Maryland has drastically longer waiting periods for expungement than most other states. [Maryland Code Ann., Criminal Procedure §10–110](#) states that an individual must wait **10 years** before they are eligible to expunge most *nonviolent* misdemeanor convictions from their record, **15 years** for a common-law battery or 2nd-degree assault conviction, and **15 years** for a non-violent felony. The waiting period kicks in *after* they have completed their entire sentence, parole or probation, drug treatment, *and* any mandatory supervision. In most instances, the waiting periods are *far* longer than the actual sentence, leaving individuals released from incarceration with barriers to education, employment, housing, public assistance, occupational licensing, and much more.

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According to a [recently released report](#) (pg.4-5) from Collateral Consequences Resource Center (CCRC), 42 other states have shorter waiting periods for misdemeanor expungement, including Texas, Alabama, Mississippi, and Utah. Regarding non-violent felonies, Maryland ranks 35th in the nation on expungement waiting periods, far behind Colorado, Arkansas, North Dakota, and Oklahoma. This means that the consequences that come with a record aren't temporary but derail returning citizens for decades to come.

These are a sample of the issues that an individual with a criminal record faces when trying to re-enter society. More information laying out the impact of incarceration on Marylanders can be found in Part III of [JOTF's Criminalization of Poverty Report](#) from 2018. These concerns must be studied further and HB0544 seeks to do just that. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on HB0544 and are open to discussing the bill's provisions with the committee members.