



**MARYLAND  
LEGAL AID**

*Advancing*  
**Human Rights and  
Justice for All**

March 1, 2024

Delegate Clippinger  
Chairman, Judicial Proceedings Committee  
6 Bladen Street, House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: Testimony Supporting House Bill 0523 - Criminal Procedure - Expungement of Records – Good Cause – Invitation from Delegate Simpson – Urging a Favorable Report**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of this important bill, which will allow Marylanders to move forward from criminal convictions and more readily remove barriers to employment, stable housing, and more.

Maryland Legal Aid (MLA) is a non-profit law firm that provides free civil legal services to Maryland's low-income and vulnerable residents. MLA handles civil legal cases involving a wide range of issues, including criminal record expungements. Expungements help remove barriers to obtaining child custody, securing stable housing, getting a driver's license, and securing employment.

House Bill 0523 allows expungement with a finding of good cause. MLA supports the addition of expungement based upon a finding of good cause which will allow the courts to read the statute in light of the legislature's clear preference for expungement and to promote the interests of justice.

This bill will directly benefit your constituents and thousands of Maryland families by allowing judges to grant a petition for expungement upon a showing of good cause. This bill expands access to justice and employment opportunities for low-income Marylanders. This bill allows for judge's discretion in an expungement analysis. Because each individual case is as different as each individual person involved, state law should grant courts discretion to grant expungements under a good cause standard. This bill would preserve appeal rights for both the state and the petitioner.

MLA clients often come to us with a criminal conviction that has been on their record for a decade or more. These charges often "lock in" other charges that would otherwise be expungable. Marylanders' criminal histories impact the most critical aspects of their day to day lives. It comes as no surprise that obtaining employment is an integral part of reentry and reduces recidivism. Granting expungements based on a showing of good cause benefits communities by allowing people to move on from their pasts and obtain basic necessities such as employment and housing. Expungement is therefore a legal practice that can have an immense effect on a person's life.

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The passage of this bill will increase employment and stable housing resulting in reduced recidivism, more stable families, and also facilitate community empowerment and involvement. In this way, not only those receiving an expungement benefit, but Maryland as a whole benefits from having stable communities, employable citizens, and financial contributions to the state from income taxes. Current expungement law would benefit from the addition of a good cause standard. House Bill 0523 encourages and empowers individuals to overcome past mistakes and re-enter society to participate meaningfully in the workforce, therefore MLA supports it.

Respectfully submitted.

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Community Lawyering Initiative  
Maryland Legal Aid