

**LEGISLATIVE POSITION:**

**Favorable**

**House Bill 658 – Clean Slate Act of 2024**

**Judiciary Committee**

**Tuesday, March 5, 2024**

Dear Chairman Clippinger and Members of the Committee:

Founded in 1968, the Maryland Chamber of Commerce is the leading voice for business in Maryland. We are a statewide coalition of more than 6,800 members and federated partners working to develop and promote strong public policy that ensures sustained economic health and growth for Maryland businesses, employees, and families.

HB 658 would improve access to criminal record sealing, a common-sense measure that will grow our workforce and strengthen our businesses. This legislation would allow for the automatic expungement of certain charges after a certain amount of time after the completion of a sentence.

[A recent report from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce](#) confirms what we already knew to be true: Maryland's businesses are facing a hiring crisis. With only 33 available workers for every 100 open jobs, our labor market is ranked as one of the worst in the country. Employers urgently need new talent that is ready and able to work. By automatically clearing old criminal records for individuals who remain crime-free, HB 658 will give employers access to a diverse and underutilized workforce almost immediately.

Over 400,000 Marylanders are currently eligible to have their old criminal records fully cleared, but are held back by a process that is expensive, time-consuming, and difficult to navigate. HB 658 would alleviate those burdens, ending a restriction currently limiting our labor force. This new, expansive workforce would have tremendous benefits for our employers that go beyond the labor shortage, allowing our state's businesses to grow and succeed. Employers who hire justice-impacted workers [report](#) that their quality of work and contributions are on par with or better than other employees, and turnover rates are notably lower.

Additionally, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce [released a report](#) in 2021 that estimated that excluding formerly incarcerated job seekers from the work force has cost the United States at least \$78 billion in lost gross domestic product. The ability to hire and retain qualified, hard-working individuals will help sustain healthy and prosperous businesses throughout Maryland.

The Maryland Chamber believes in the importance of second chance employment, both for developing our state's workforce and for uplifting our communities. In recent years, through our Maryland Chamber Foundation, the Maryland Chamber of Commerce has been actively engaged in seeking ways to address the challenges faced by the ex-offender community as these individuals

prepare for and seek employment post-incarceration. We believe all Marylanders should be able to actively serve their communities.

For these reasons, the Maryland Chamber of Commerce respectfully requests a **Favorable Report** on **HB 658**.

MDCHAMBER.ORG

60 West Street, Suite 100, Annapolis 21401 | 410-269-0642

