



**HB658: AUTOMATED EXPUNGEMENT, WAITING PERIODS, AND ADVERSE ACTIONS
(CLEAN SLATE ACT OF 2024)**

HEARING BEFORE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
3/5/2024

*Connecting Individuals and
Families who need Civil Legal
Services with Volunteer
Attorneys and Community
Resources*

POSITION: SUPPORT

Shore Legal Access, Inc. (formerly Mid-Shore Pro Bono) supports HB658. This bill would automate the expungement process for certain offenses, significantly reducing the barriers for those seeking criminal record expungement. This measure would help clean the records of many Marylanders without the burden of navigating the complex expungement process, allowing them to access employment, housing, and education.

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Shore Legal Access (SLA) connects people with limited financial means on the Eastern Shore to legal representation and essential community resources. Each year, SLA helps over 3,000 people in our community access the legal services when they would otherwise be unable to afford such services. These services help families gain financial and housing stability and create safe, secure homes for children.

SLA has been providing criminal record expungement services for many years. Currently, SLA hosts expungement clinics, providing expungement legal services in 8 counties on the Eastern Shore. Since April 2023, SLA has held 19 expungement clinics and assisted 281 clients seeking expungements.

The impact of obtaining a criminal record expungement for our clients is huge. Clients with a clean record can obtain better jobs and make more money. This is the top reason for those seeking criminal record expungement services from SLA. Additionally, there are more housing opportunities for those with a clean criminal record, which is particularly essential with the lack of affordable housing. We see this firsthand when working with tenants who have limited housing options due to having a record. Even educational opportunities are more available to those with clean records. Often, we see clients who are attempting to get into school for a particular trade, such as a nursing program or to become a CDL driver.

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The Clean Slate Act would reduce barriers for those seeking criminal record expungement by eliminating the burden of navigating the complex expungement process. To obtain an expungement currently, first, one must obtain their entire criminal record and detailed information about each case in which they hope to expunge. Second, the petitioner must determine whether each conviction is eligible for expungement according to the expungement laws of Maryland. For those convictions eligible for expungement, a petition is drafted and filed, along with a filing fee. If the State objects to the expungement, a court hearing is scheduled. Without an attorney, this process is difficult to complete. By automating the expungement process, eligible candidates for expungements may forgo this complicated process all together.

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For these reasons, Shore Legal Access supports HB658 and we urge the Committee's support for this bill. If you have any questions regarding our position, please contact Laura L. Chafey, Esq., at 410-690-8128 or LChafey@shorelegal.org. Thank you.