



LEGISLATIVE BLACK CAUCUS OF MARYLAND, INC.

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March 4, 2024

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Chairman Luke Clippinger,
101 House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chairman Clippinger and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

The Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland offers strong favorable support for House Bill 658 -Criminal Procedure - Automated Expungement, Waiting Periods, and Adverse Actions (Clean Slate Act of 2024), a bill that will automate the expungement process for eligible charges in Maryland. **This bill is on the 2024 legislative priority agenda of the Black Caucus**

A criminal record can be both the cause and consequence of poverty and has detrimental effects on the employment, housing, education, and licensing prospects for the [estimated 25% of working-age Marylanders with a record](#) (pg.33). 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, leaving African-African Marylanders disproportionately impacted by lack of access to education, housing, and employment due to a criminal record. [One out of three](#) Marylanders returning from incarceration return to Baltimore City, with Prince George's County as a close second. Combined, these two jurisdictions make up over half of the black population in Maryland (56%) - so when returning citizens are denied jobs, housing, and other necessities, these communities are hit hardest. The Black Caucus remains at the forefront in supporting pathways to re-entry for public safety, family unity, opportunity, and access to generational wealth.

In 2016, Maryland passed the [Justice Reinvestment Act](#), which allowed many misdemeanors and a few felonies to be eligible for expungement after the completion of the sentence, including parole, probation, and any form of mandatory supervision. This gave a tremendous amount of breathing room to systems-impacted persons- primarily African Americans- in their pursuits to reacclimate into society, secure jobs and education, and obtain an occupational license. However, only 2% of people with convictions eligible for expungement actually took advantage of the service, either because of backlogs within the courts or because they just didn't know that they were eligible. We applaud the work of expungement practitioners throughout the state for hosting clinics to address this issue, but we believe there is a better way.

House Bill 658, in coordination with the Department of Public Safety and Corrections (DPSCS) and The Administrative Office of the Courts, creates an automated expungement process to shift the burden from the potentially unaware person to state agents. If this bill were to pass, 410,000 Maryland adults could have their records cleared overnight. It does not alter the manual petition process listed in Criminal Procedure §10-110 or §10-105 but layers on it an automated expungement process by

creating a new section in §10–113. It also addresses concerns with the Abhishek Case by incorporating the bill language from [SB0454](#), another [Black Caucus priority](#), that will remove decades-old probation violations from hindering the expungement process. The Maryland Legislative Black Caucus fully supports efforts to remove barriers to employment, education, housing, and more for African Americans throughout the state. For these reasons, the Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland supports House Bill 658 and asks that you vote favorably on this bill.

Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland