

**SUPPORTING HB 658/SB 602
(CLEAN SLATE ACT OF 2024)**



March 4, 2024

Quaker Voice of Maryland is submitting this testimony in favor of **HB658 – Clean Slate Act of 2024**

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

As members of the Religious Society of Friends (also called Quakers), we recognize that forgiveness is one of the most basic tenets of spirituality. The Clean Slate Act is a very tangible way to show compassion for people living with an arrest or criminal record by allowing them to have their slate wiped clean so they can become productive, crime-free citizens.

As you well know, people with arrest or criminal records are often "sentenced" to a life of poverty that is manifested through reduced opportunities for adequate housing, education, and employment. Most colleges and universities, landlords, and employers run background checks on prospective students, renters, and employees. Moreover, ordinary, tax-paying citizens are "sentenced" to a life of bearing the burden of helping to provide for people when they are denied opportunities for education, housing, or employment. The Clean Slate Act can potentially give people with an arrest or criminal record a chance to rebuild their lives and contribute to our society rather than being a strain on it.

As a son of sharecroppers, I am conscious of what my life could have been had I not had the opportunity to attend college, become a college professor, and later a college president. Let us not waste people's potential to become contributors to society because we were not willing to help them overcome the mistakes of the past through automated expungement of clean slate eligible charges. No one has gone so far that they can't be redeemed, restored, forgiven, and given a second chance under the right conditions.

Our research shows that a number of states, including Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, Virginia, and New York, have passed "Clean Slate" laws, and many more have active campaigns to do so across the country. We are grateful to Delegates Moon, Barlett, Crutchfield, and Williams for sponsoring House Bill 658 and hope that all who have the power and influence will ensure that Maryland is added to the list of states that seek to help break the certifiable cycle of poverty and give as many of our citizens as possible, estimated at more than 400,000, an opportunity to achieve their full potential and contribute meaningfully to society.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Clinton Pettus", with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Clinton Pettus, Ph.D.

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