
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 815
**Occupational Licensing and Certification – Criminal History – Prohibited
Disclosures**
Finance
March 6, 2025

Social Work Advocates for Social Change strongly supports SB 815, which seeks to make occupational licensing or certification more available to individuals with criminal histories. We support the prohibition of disclosure for applicants with a criminal history when attempting to acquire a license or certificate. We recognize the need for greater access for people with a criminal record when seeking licenses and certifications necessary to advance careers, economic and social stability.

Provisions in SB 815 could help mitigate the impacts of racial inequities in Maryland’s carceral system. The potential to combat racial inequity in Maryland’s criminal justice, correctional, and rehabilitation systems is significant. Historically marginalized Marylanders are disproportionately represented in the state's prison population. Specifically, while comprising 29% of Maryland's population, they make up 71% of the state's prison population, totaling over 11,360 individuals. Of the 3,095 inmates released in 2023, approximately 2,200 were from historically marginalized communities. This bill aims to remove barriers related to criminal histories for obtaining occupational licenses and certifications, promoting improved access to employment, higher earnings, and self-empowerment for historically marginalized Marylanders with criminal records.

Expanding access to occupational licenses and certifications by prohibiting disclosures of certain criminal histories could help reduce recidivism. One of the primary causes of recidivism is a lack of resources, specifically education, employment, and housing.¹ SB 815 directly or indirectly affects all three of these resources. Obtaining a license or certification requires education and has the potential to enhance a person’s employment and income. Enhanced employment and income increase a person’s ability to secure adequate housing. SB 815 helps to address one of the potential roadblocks in this process by limiting what types of criminal histories may be considered when acquiring an occupational certification.

Maryland’s small businesses would benefit from more people with occupational licenses and certifications. Maryland requires licensure or certification in 167 out of 331 occupations.² Increasing the pool of eligible, licensed, or certified employees could

¹ *What is recidivism? And why is addressing it key to reducing crime?* (2022). Stand Together. <https://standtogether.org/stories/strong-safe-communities/what-is-recidivism-and-why-is-addressing-it-key-to-reducing-repeat-crime>

² Timmons, E., Norris, C., & Trudeau, N. (2024). A Snapshot of Occupational Licensing in Maryland. In *West Virginia University*. <https://csorwvu.com/maryland-snapshot/>

positively impact small business employers within the state. One such field of employment is an HVAC technician. Currently, there is a shortage of HVAC technicians, and the field is expected to grow by 15% over the next decade.³ By creating additional paths to remove barriers to licensure or certification for individuals with criminal histories, small businesses may find it easier to fill positions requiring professional licensure or certification, enhancing their operations and contributing to Maryland's economy.

Increasing the avenues through which formerly incarcerated Marylanders can access occupational licenses and certifications could have substantial fiscal benefits to the state's revenues. From a budgetary perspective, the bill's potential economic benefits are considerable. Calculations based on the percentage of civilians requiring a license or certification for employment and the state's prison population, Maryland could see a potential \$2 million increase in annual tax revenue due to new employment and higher incomes for people with non-violent criminal history acquiring a license or certificate. Using the HVAC technician example, as of January 2025, the average salary for an HVAC technician in Maryland was \$66,481 per year or \$31.96 per hour.⁴ Compared to the average wage of a person with a misdemeanor criminal history makes 22% less per year.⁵

SB 815 could enhance economic opportunities for a significant portion of Maryland's population, increase Maryland's revenues, and address some of the racial disparities within the state's criminal justice system by reducing the length of time requiring criminal history disclosure from a conviction to 3 years and limiting the scope of criminal history that can be considered when seeking occupational licensing or certification.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change is a coalition of MSW students at the University of Maryland School of Social Work that seeks to promote equity and justice through public policy, and to engage the communities impacted by public policy in the policymaking process.

³ *Maryland HVAC Training.* (2025). HVAC School.
<https://www.hvacschool.org/maryland/#:~:text=The%20demand%20for%20trained%20and,to%20the%20Baltimore%20Business%20Journal>.

⁴ *HVAC Technician: Average Salary in Maryland in 2025.* (2025). Talent.
[https://www.talent.com/salary?job=hvac+technician&location=maryland#:~:text=\\$63%2C771,\\$68%2C806](https://www.talent.com/salary?job=hvac+technician&location=maryland#:~:text=$63%2C771,$68%2C806)

⁵ *Resource Guide for Maryland Journalists.* (2018). The Clean Slate Initiative.
<https://www.cleanslateinitiative.org/maryland#:~:text=People%20convicted%20of%20a%20felony,an%20average%20of%2022%20percent>.