



**SB 514 - Real Property - Landlord and Tenant – Residential Leases- Prospective Tenant Criminal History Records Check (Maryland Fair Chance Housing Act)**

**Position: FAVORABLE**

Dear Chair Smith and members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Ricarra Jones, and I am the Political Director with 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East. We are the largest healthcare workers union in the nation, with 10,000 members in Maryland and Washington, DC.

1199 SEIU believes Senate Bill 514 is a critical measure to ensure that our returning Maryland residents are given an equitable opportunity to secure housing.

1199 SEIU believes in supporting our returning residents to lead healthy and thriving lives. Prisons are not healing spaces, so ensuring safe and habitable home sets the foundation for a healthy mind and body. Returning residents often struggle with mental health issues and homelessness only aggravates mental health issues. People who lack adequate housing in the first year after they return from incarceration are more than twice as likely to commit another crime than those with adequate housing. Therefore it is crucial that those who have been through the criminal justice system have the opportunity to secure that housing.

SB 514 would (1) give prospective tenants fair consideration when trying to find a home, (2) reduce recidivism rates in Maryland, and (3) give many more Marylanders the opportunity to pursue career and educational opportunities that they might otherwise be limited in obtaining due to limited housing opportunities for people with a criminal history. Additionally, due to historic institutionalized racism in the criminal justice system criminal record discrimination has an enormous disparate impact on Black households. Black people make up 32 percent of the state's population, yet they make up nearly 71 percent of the state's jail and prison population.<sup>1</sup> SB 514 addresses this harm by ensuring that those who have already been discriminated against do not become homeless after release because of institutional racism in the criminal justice system.

SB 514 limits a landlord's review of an applicant's criminal record. This bill provides that if a tenant meets all other acceptance criteria for the landlord, the landlord should make a conditional offer of tenancy before checking the criminal background. Then, in checking a prospective tenant's criminal background, the landlord may not consider certain criminal records within a three-year lookback period. The landlord is still allowed the option to withdraw the conditional based on convictions such as first-degree murder and human trafficking as well as being registered on the lifetime sexual registration list. If in the event, an applicant is denied based on one of these convictions, the tenant can still provide mitigating evidence in hopes the landlord may reconsider

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<sup>1</sup> <https://trends.vera.org/state/MD>



the denial. This balances the prospective tenant's need for fair housing with the landlord's ability to screen for certain potentially relevant considerations related to criminal records.

Many states, and Washington D.C., have passed Fair Chance bills that are similar to SB 514. A number of these jurisdictions have reported success after implementation.<sup>2</sup> Research has shown renters in these localities have been given wider access to housing.<sup>3</sup> Additionally landlords, have not seen an increase in adverse incidents; nor has implementation of these laws resulted in significant capacity burdens for landlords. Passing SB 514 Fair Chance is a step in the right direction for all Marylanders.

1199SEIU urges a favorable report on SB 0514.

Sincerely,

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<sup>2</sup> Vera Institute of Justice, [Fair Chance Housing: Lessons in Implementation](https://www.vera.org/publications/fair-chance-housing#:~:text=Fair%20Chance%20Housing%20Lessons%20in%20Implementation&text=A%20person's%20conviction%20history%20should,especially%20after%20release%20from%20incarceration.)  
<https://www.vera.org/publications/fair-chance-housing#:~:text=Fair%20Chance%20Housing%20Lessons%20in%20Implementation&text=A%20person's%20conviction%20history%20should,especially%20after%20release%20from%20incarceration.>