

Monday, February 3, 2025



Showing Up for Racial Justice

Dear Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

I am submitting this testimony as a member of Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, a group of individuals working to mobilize white people in a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. We are working in collaboration with Out for Justice. I am a resident of Baltimore City. **I am testifying in support of SB0398 - Criminal Procedure - Automated Expungement.**

Eligibility for criminal record expungement has expanded since the Maryland General Assembly passed the Justice Reinvestment and REDEEM Acts. However, an overwhelming majority of individuals who could have their charges expunged never petition the courts to do so, as they are either unaware they are eligible for expungement or unable to navigate the confusing and burdensome process through the court system. Only a tiny percentage of Marylanders whose convictions are eligible for expungement—less than 10%—actually get their records expunged within 5 years of becoming eligible.

This has lasting negative effects. Charges that people could have had expunged may instead remain on their records permanently, which can dramatically and harmfully impact their lives. Having a criminal record can render a person unable to rent an apartment, obtain employment or work credentials, gain admission to college or to programs that help pay for college, keep custody of one's children, access some government services, or vote in elections. These avoidable and undue consequences limit people's lives and ability to participate meaningfully in society and contribute to their communities, as well as to remain out of the justice system.

SB0398 would protect people from the stigma of unexpunged convictions by automating parts of the expungement process. It would require the courts to remove from public view (including the judiciary case search website) all offenses that are eligible for expungement, without the necessity of the person whose case it is filing a request for expungement. This

ensures that a “clean slate” is available not just in theory, but in practice for any Marylanders who are eligible.

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote **in support of SB0398 - Criminal Procedure – Automated Expungement.**

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,
Dr. Katherine Blaha
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