

HB55 Criminal Procedure – Expungement of Records – Good Cause

HEARING BEFORE THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

3/4/2025

POSITION: FAVORABLE

Shore Legal Access (formerly Mid-Shore Pro Bono) supports HB55. This bill would expand opportunities for expungement for people who have served their sentence, paid their debt to society, and now need to move on with their lives to obtain housing and employment. This bill would help to mitigate the significant adverse consequences and collateral damage caused by having a criminal record. This bill would further advance Maryland's work to expand access to criminal record expungement and further support the waiting workforce of people with records seeking to improve their economic circumstances.

Shore Legal Access (SLA) connects people on the Eastern Shore with limited financial means to legal representation and essential community resources. Each year, SLA helps over 3,800 people in our community access the legal system when they would otherwise be shut out. Our small legal team and network of volunteer lawyers provide free legal services for eviction prevention, criminal record expungement, life and estate planning, family law, foreclosure, and consumer debt. These services help families gain financial and housing stability and create safe, secure homes for children.

SLA is a provider of legal representation for criminal record expungement cases in 8 Eastern Shore counties (Caroline, Dorchester, Queen Anne's, Somerset, Talbot, Wicomico, and Worcester). Since Maryland's law changed to expand access to criminal record expungement and decriminalize cannabis, SLA has helped hundreds of people on the Eastern Shore to get their records cleared. Our volunteer attorneys provide the necessary research and document preparation required to prepare and file an expungement petition. About half of the people seeking our services are unable to file a petition for expungement, due to a range of factors including the waiting period and the unit rule requiring that all charges in the case be eligible.



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People with felony records especially face significant barriers due to the limited access to expungement, long waiting periods, and stigma. There are limited resources supporting re-entry in rural areas of Maryland. Good cause expungement would provide much needed relief to help people get back on their feet more quickly and get back to work. The Eastern Shore has a disproportionately large number of people involved with the criminal justice system, particularly in Dorchester, Wicomico, Worcester, and Somerset Counties where the rate of incarceration is more than twice the state average. Our communities would benefit from having a stronger workforce and greater economic and social opportunities.

Good cause would significantly reduce the burden on people who have earned and deserve to have their records. SLA supports HB55 and urges the Committee's favorable recommendation on this bill. If you have any questions regarding our position, please contact Meredith Girard, Executive Director at 410.690.8128 or e-mail mgirard@shorelegal.org.

*Client's name changed to protect confidentiality

