

Testimony in Support of HB0055
Criminal Procedure - Expungement of Records - Good Cause
Submitted by: Melody Mitchell

My name is Melody Mitchell and I am testifying today in strong support of HB0055, which would allow individuals to petition for expungement of their criminal records if a court determines there is "Good Cause" to do so. I urge you to support this bill because it offers individuals like me who have already paid their debts to society the opportunity to move forward and build a future free from the burdens of past mistakes.

I made mistakes in my past but I have long since overpaid my debts. I have dedicated myself to rehabilitation, growth, and positive contributions to my community. However, despite my transformation, I continue to be denied opportunities because of a minor criminal record. Recently, I attempted to enroll in medical school, only to find that I was ineligible due to my record. That rejection was devastating because I have worked tirelessly to improve myself and create a better life for my family.

It is disheartening to be judged indefinitely for past actions, despite evidence of change. The continued punishment through restricted access to education, employment, and financial stability is unjust. If the President of the United States can hold office while facing numerous felony charges, why are ordinary citizens who have completed their sentences and demonstrated true rehabilitation still being denied the ability to fully participate in society?

The impact of a criminal record in Maryland is staggering. According to the Prison Policy Initiative, the unemployment rate for formerly incarcerated individuals is nearly 27%, five times higher than the general population. Additionally, research shows that individuals with a record earn significantly less over their lifetimes, with estimates suggesting that people with a conviction lose an average of \$100,000 in earnings over their careers. This is not just an individual burden it is an economic and social crisis that affects families and communities statewide.

Higher education should be a gateway to success, not another barrier. Many professional programs and licensing boards restrict access to individuals with criminal records, creating a cycle where those who have rehabilitated cannot obtain the education necessary to secure stable employment. How can we expect individuals to become self-sufficient if we continually deny them the very tools to do so?

Judges, who are entrusted with assessing the totality of a person's character and rehabilitation, should have the ability to determine when an individual deserves a second chance. Yet, under current law, many of them are powerless to do so. HB0055 would correct this flaw by giving judges discretion to expunge records when warranted by Good Cause ensuring that those who have proven their commitment to change are not permanently held back.

These barriers do not just hurt individuals they harm families, create economic instability, and perpetuate cycles of poverty and recidivism. When people cannot secure housing, employment,

or education, they are far more likely to return to old habits out of necessity. We must break this cycle.

I urge you to support HB0055. This bill would allow individuals like me, who have worked tirelessly to change, to fully reenter society and contribute meaningfully. We ask only for the opportunity to prove that we are more than our past mistakes. A vote favoring HB0055 is a vote for fairness, economic progress, and a stronger Maryland.

Thank you for your time and consideration.