

MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



351 Dubois Rd, Annapolis, MD 21401

Written Testimony in Support of: HB 0545 Automated Expungement

Dear Chair and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

I write to you today on behalf of the Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform, a nonprofit, nonpartisan, grassroots advocacy organization that believes in second chances and in the fundamental fairness of our justice system, submitting this testimony in strong support of HB 0545, which would establish procedures for the automated expungement of certain criminal records by the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services and the Judiciary. This bill builds on the progress Maryland has made in criminal justice reform by ensuring that individuals with eligible records, particularly those involving cannabis possession, receive the relief they deserve without unnecessary procedural hurdles. The consequences of a criminal record, even for minor offenses, can be lifelong, affecting employment, housing, education, and financial opportunities. While Maryland has taken steps to decriminalize and legalize cannabis possession, the collateral consequences of prior convictions continue to harm individuals, families, and communities.

Expungement provides a pathway for individuals to move forward without the stigma of a past conviction, allowing them to fully participate in society and contribute to the economy. Automating the expungement process is a necessary step to make this relief accessible. The current petition-based system places an undue burden on individuals, many of whom may not be aware of their eligibility or have the financial means to navigate the process. By making expungement automatic, HB 0545 ensures that justice is not reserved only for those with the time and resources to pursue it but is instead applied equitably across all affected individuals. Other states have successfully implemented automated expungement systems, demonstrating that this policy is both feasible and effective, helping to reduce the administrative burden of the expungement process, helping states become more efficient. Maryland should follow suit by embracing a fair, efficient, and equitable approach that aligns with our commitment to criminal justice reform. For these reasons, we respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 0545. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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The Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR) is a nonpartisan, all-volunteer organization of nearly 2000 Marylanders who advocate for sensible evidence-based legislative and policy changes in Maryland's correctional practices. MAJR thanks you for the opportunity to provide input on this legislation and urges a favorable report.