

Dear **Members of the Judiciary Committee,**

This testimony is being submitted by Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, a group of individuals working to move white folks as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. We are also working in collaboration with Out for Justice. I am a resident of **District 40 and live in the Medfield neighborhood of Baltimore. I am testifying in support of HB0545 - Criminal Procedure – Automated Expungement.**



**Showing Up for Racial Justice**

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. They may be unaware they are eligible for expungement or unable to navigate the process in an overburdened court system. The result is that 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.<sup>1</sup>

This has lasting effects. Charges that people could have had expunged may instead remain on their records permanently, which can dramatically impact their lives for the worse. Potential consequences of having a criminal record include being 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.<sup>2</sup> These avoidable consequences limit people's lives and ability to participate meaningfully in society and contribute to their communities.

**HB0545** 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.

**If expungement is available to an individual, there is no reason to erect barriers to access it! It should be automated as much as possible, and not be dependent on eligible folks to navigate the legal system, seek out advice, sift through legal websites or documents, or file paperwork. This will make the process easier on both individuals and the legal system.**

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote **in support of HB0545 - Criminal Procedure – Automated Expungement**. Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Christina L Bell  
1301 W 42nd St., Baltimore, Md 21211  
Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore

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<sup>1</sup>C. Chien, "America's Paper Prisons: The Second Chance Gap." *Mich. L. Rev.*, 119(3). <https://doi.org/10.36644/mlr.119.3.america> Cited in The Clean Slate Initiative Resource Guide for Maryland Journalists, <https://www.cleanslateinitiative.org/maryland>

<sup>2</sup> The People's Law Library of Maryland, "Expungement and Changing Your Criminal Record," <https://www.peoples-law.org/expungement-and-changing-your-criminal-record>; Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform, "Expungement" <https://www.ma4jr.org/expungement/>