



Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

Testimony in Support of HB 545- Criminal Procedure - Automated Expungement

TO: Delegate Luke Clippinger, Chair and Members of the Judiciary Committee
FROM: Karen “Candy” Clark, Criminal Justice Lead Advocate
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland
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The state-wide Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland strongly asks your support for **HB 545- Criminal Procedure- Automated Expungement**. This bill is a dream come true for many people who have made some regretful mistakes, which have haunted them most of their adult lives! For me, my early experience with expungement was about 10 years ago, when I first began doing volunteer advocacy work.

My first expungement event was in a large church near Baltimore on a stormy day. Participants had to catch a bus ride from the city to get to the site. Then they would wait in line in a cold, wet alcove until they could have a seat and talk with a volunteer lawyer who helped with all the paperwork—about 20 lawyers were there that day. Sometimes the clients were missing a document and they had to leave and come back another time. If the fee wasn't paid by a volunteer advocacy group, then they would have to pay the lawyers' fee out of their own pocket.

I was assigned to monitor the bus pick up site where I talked with the participants as they came and went. While many had big smiles, others—who had carried this shameful scar in their heart too long—were sobbing grateful tears.

Free at last!

This bill will remove any cannabis charges from their records. This way their records will align with the recent drug bills that Maryland's Legislature has passed. In addition, court records must be removed from public view. Getting this system established will take a few years, therefore the beginning date for the Judiciary Department to start reviewing cases is anticipated to be August 1, 2027. Once a month, the department will review all the cases that are newly eligible for expungement because they have reached 7 years from the offense.

The Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland has chosen to support **HB 545** because it aligns with our [values](#) of justice and equity, and our goal to engage and treat all people with dignity and respect. We strongly hope you will do likewise.

Respectfully,
Candy Clark
Criminal Justice Lead

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