



**Senate Bill 0483
Criminal Procedure - Automated Expungement
(Clean Slate Act of 2026)
In the Judicial Proceedings Committee
Hearing on February 17, 2026
Position: FAVORABLE**

Maryland Legal Aid (MLA) submits its written and oral testimony on SB 0483 in response to a request from Senator Sydnor.

MLA testifies in support of SB 0483. The Clean Slate Act expands access to justice for Marylanders by allowing for automatic sealing and shielding of *already qualified criminal records*. Clean Slate laws make expungement more accessible to low-income people and reduce the strain on legal service providers and court resources.

Over the past decade, the Maryland General Assembly has increased expungement opportunities for Marylanders. Still, [most eligible individuals do not file for expungement](#)¹, and miss out on the many tangible impacts of an expunged record, like increased work and educational prospects and better housing.

The Clean Slate Act addresses a critical justice gap. On its face, expungement is available to any Marylander who qualifies. In reality, Maryland's petition-based expungement filing system is not easy to use without an attorney. For example, there are four different forms that a pro se litigant must choose from, and the language on the forms is confusing and sometimes contradictory. Expunging convictions (versus dismissals or acquittals) has the most impact on an individual's ability to obtain housing and employment, but that requires a filing fee of \$30. This might seem like a nominal fee to higher-income individuals, but for low-income Marylanders struggling to pay for rent and groceries such a fee is a deterrent. While fee waivers are available, that is yet another system a petitioner must navigate. Often petitioners do not realize that they may have to attend a court hearing as part of the expungement process. The logistics of attending court can be overwhelming (securing childcare, time off from work, or transportation), and many petitioners simply give up at this stage.

The Clean Slate Act would alleviate resource strain for both legal service providers and the court system. When petitioners cannot navigate the expungement process on their own, they turn to providers like MLA. MLA represented or advised over 2,000 people on expungements last year. Even with that level of service, MLA and other legal service providers have nowhere

¹ Paper Prisons, *The Maryland Second Chance Expungement Gap*, <https://paperprisons.org/states/pdfs/summaries/The%20Maryland%20Second%20Chance%20Expungement%20Gap%20Report%20Summary1.pdf> (last visited Feb. 12, 2026).

close to the resources necessary to represent the 1.5 million people who have a criminal record in Maryland. Additionally, in MLA's experience, many of these hearings are set in for administrative rather than substantive reasons and could be avoided completely by utilizing the automatic method proposed by the Clean Slate Act. In this way, the Clean Slate Act also addresses the strain that the current petition-based expungement process places on the courts.

MLA urges a favorable report on SB 0483, to allow all Marylanders equitable access to expungement.

If you would like additional information on this bill, or the underlying issues it addresses, please contact Meaghan McDermott, Advocacy Director for Community Lawyering and Development, at mmcdermott@mdl原因.org.