



## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 819

### *Commission to Examine the Expungement Laws of Maryland*

TO: Hon. Sandy Bartlett, Chair, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee  
FROM: Zachary Alberts, Director of Advocacy

The Center for Urban Families (CFUF), a West Baltimore workforce and family-strengthening community-based organization, advocates for legislation that strengthens urban communities by helping fathers and families achieve stability and economic success.

We are here to voice our support for House Bill 819, which would establish a commission to examine Maryland's expungement laws. We work daily with the communities most impacted by the limited scope of Maryland's expungement laws. In Maryland today, there are over 1,000 different charges a person can be convicted of, yet only approximately 120 of these are eligible for expungement. This leaves countless Marylanders permanently branded by their past mistakes without any pathway to a clear record.

Research consistently shows that employment is one of the strongest predictors of successful reentry and reduced recidivism. Our current expungement laws work against these outcomes.

The arbitrary nature of what can and cannot be expunged becomes clear when examining specific cases. Here is a selection of convictions that permanently mark someone's record, impacting employment, education and housing opportunities:

- CR 5-709: Possession of inhalant for distribution [**note that possession with intent to distribute other narcotics IS expungable, but because this conviction is in 5-709 as opposed to 5-602, it was not made expungable.**]
- FL 2-406e: did unlawfully perform a marriage ceremony between (bride) and (groom) without a license.
- PS 10-104a2: did discharge fireworks without required permit.
- CR 3-806: did knowingly use a laser pointer to illuminate in a public place [an individual] in a manner that [harassed/endangered] the said [individual].
- CR 6-403: TRESPASS: PRIVATE PROPERTY [**note that trespassing under 6-402 IS expungable, but 403 is not.**]

These examples illustrate the problem with the current hodgepodge collection of expungable charges – similar (sometimes identical) offenses receive different treatment depending on where they are in the code and 100s of minor offenses levy a permanent scarlet letter while more serious ones do not.



Working with partners like the Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service, the Center for Urban Families puts on quarterly expungement clinics for our members, about 50% of whom are justice impacted. For every 100 individuals that come to get their records expunged, approximately 20 are able to do so, due to the convoluted expungability list.

HB 819 would convene a group of experts from across the political, government and criminal justice system to re-examine our expungement laws, as well as those in other states, to decide whether such a low record clearance rate is what is best for Maryland.

I urge the Committee to give House Bill 819 a favorable report.