



Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

Testimony in Support HB 360- Criminal Procedure - Automated Expungement (Clean Slate Act of 2026)

To: Delegate Sandy Bartlett, Chair and the Members of the Judiciary Committee
From: Karen “Candy” Clark, Lead Advocate Criminal Justice Reform
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry-Maryland
Date: March 3, 2026

The Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland asks for a favorable vote on **HB 360- Criminal Procedure - Automated Expungement (Clean Slate Act of 2026)**. This bill aligns with our values of justice and equity, which call us to honor the inherent worth and dignity of all people, which includes those behind prison walls.

For years, our Judicial system has maintained a culture of being “tough on crime.” These policies resulted in making it more difficult for those in prison to rehabilitate, which didn’t prepare for a life outside of the prison walls, driving up recidivism.

Gradually it became evident that a “smart about crime” approach would create a more successful way to “out grow” the barriers. Instead of locking people up and throwing away the key, avenues were explored to prepare those in prison to become a functioning member of society after they were released from prison. However, one of the many difficulties people experienced was having to carry their records with them, which were often used against them. Expungement is a key aspect of this approach.

A plan is currently in the making that would make automatic expungement operable by 2028. **The Clean Slate Act** is being designed to automatically remove cases that have met specific earned criteria by reducing the time limit that an individual must keep their criminal record accessible to others; once these records are expunged, it increases the chances that a person who has served their sentence will obtain access to job opportunities. In fact, In a year-long study in Michigan, individuals who had kept their record cleared for a year had an 11% greater chance of getting employment and earned 22% higher wages.

I have seen first-hand how powerful expungement can be. About 10 years ago, I volunteered at an expungement event on a stormy day, in a large church near Baltimore. 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!

Our Unitarian Universalist Ministry supports bills that align with our values, **HB 360** is a compassionate bill that UULM-MD is proud to support.

We ask for a favorable report.

Karen "Candy" Clark

Criminal Justice Reform Lead Advocate