



JUSTICE FOR ALL

MARYLAND HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
TESTIMONY OF MARYLAND VOLUNTEER LAWYERS SERVICE
**IN SUPPORT OF HB0360: CRIMINAL PROCEDURE -
EXPUNGEMENT OF RECORDS - AUTOMATED EXPUNGEMENT
(CLEAN SLATE ACT OF 2026)**
MARCH 3, 2026

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Chair Bartlett and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 0360. My name is Chris Sweeney, and I am a staff attorney at Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service (MVLS), where I manage our Workforce Development Project. MVLS is the oldest and largest provider of pro bono civil legal services to low-income Marylanders throughout the state. Since MVLS' founding in 1981, our statewide panel of over 700 volunteers has provided free legal services to over 115,000 Marylanders in a wide range of civil legal matters. Through our Workforce Development project, we represent many clients seeking sustainable, fulfilling employment. One of the major barriers to employment is a criminal record, and we have represented over 1,000 clients in expungement proceedings. For the reasons explained below, MVLS respectfully requests the committee return a favorable report on HB 0360.

MVLS' Workforce Development Project is a partnership with occupational training programs in Baltimore City and is a continuation of the Mayor's Office's 'One Baltimore for Jobs' pilot program. The goal of the program is to make participants more job-ready by reducing barriers to employment. Each of the clients we serve through the Workforce Development Project is enrolled in courses to receive job skills training and certification in welding, machine operation, nursing, pharmacy tech, construction, and weatherization. These non-profit programs are free to students and aim to provide re-entry opportunities for the previously incarcerated or those who lacked educational and employment opportunities due to poverty. The majority of clients we see through this project have criminal cases on their records.

HB0360 expands existing automatic criminal record expungement processes. This bill takes the automatic process which went into effect in 2021 and expands it to all eligible non-convictions and certain misdemeanor convictions. This legislation would be a worthy investment into Maryland's citizens - expungement opens up employment and housing opportunities and results in more people working, paying taxes, and becoming ordinary members of society. Automatic expungement would free up the court system from having to process the thousands of petitions currently filed every year.

The cases authorized for automatic expungement in this bill are those that have long been deemed eligible by our legislators. The legislation simply makes automatic what is currently available only by proactively filing a petition with the courts. With almost 25% of all Marylanders living with a criminal record, the number of petitions filed each year continues to burden court clerks with thousands of cases to process. This legislation is short-term cost resulting in long-term gain.

The temporary fiscal impact of this legislation is well-worth the long-term outcome of automatic expungement. All parties would benefit: judges, state's attorneys, and clerks would have fewer expungements to process; lawyers representing clients for expungement would have less paperwork; most importantly, people living with a criminal record would obtain relief, allowing them to improve their life through better employment, more housing opportunities, and release from the stigma of being labeled a "criminal."

MVLS has been fighting to even the playing field for low-income Marylanders for decades, and we know that these members of our community face significant financial obstacles when trying to put their lives back on track. HB0360 would advance our vision of a more just Maryland. This vision includes a system where people convicted of non-violent crimes, who have paid their debt to society and left their past behind them, can seek employment without fear of rejection. We at MVLS respectfully request a favorable report on House Bill 0360.

Miss Chair and members of the Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to testify.