

Good afternoon Chair Bartlett and members of the Committee.

My name is Amber Whalen, and I'm a resident of District 6. I'm here today to share my personal experience and ask you to support HB 819, Commission to Examine the Expungement Laws of Maryland.

Before I tell you what's on my record, I want to tell you who I was when I got it. I had never been in a trouble a day in my life. I earned my Associate's Degree from Howard Community College and was building a career as an educator in Baltimore County public schools.

Then I had a mental health crisis. I have bipolar 1 disorder, along with depression and anxiety. This all started because of a manic episode: I wasn't sleeping, I was checking myself in and out of the hospital, and the medicines I was proscribed were only making things worse.

While this was happening, my employer made a payroll error, leaving me behind on rent and bills. Every time I tried to get help, I was sent back to the same HR representative who told me over and over she couldn't help me.

Because I was manic, I snapped and sent threatening messages to the HR representative. I told her I was going to come in and shoot her. I have never owned a gun. I have never been violent. I have no history of threatening behavior. I was not and am not a threat. I was a young woman in crisis who needed care, not a criminal record. But because multiple people worked in the office (*not* the school) where she worked, I was convicted of a threat of mass violence.

Because of how background screening works, I never get the opportunity to explain what happened. Employers see my record and move on. I have to live with my mother. I can't even adopt a dog or volunteer at an animal shelter.

People who see my background think I'm dangerous, that I'm a terrorist. I hope that in the time I've had to speak with you today, you can see that I am not. I'm just a normal person, trying my best, who the fallout of a mental health crisis has defined ever since.

This commission would allow the legislature and experts to examine cases like mine and others and decide whether we're deserving of a clean record.

Thank you.