



2601 N. HOWARD STREET BALTIMORE, MD 21218

TEL (410) 625-LGBT (5428)

FAX (410) 625-7423

www.freestate-justice.org

Lauren Pruitt, Esq.

Legal Director

LPruitt@freestate-justice.org

Judiciary Committee

100 Taylor Office House Building

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

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HB0131– Criminal Procedure - Expungement - Adverse Actions and Removal From Maryland Electronic Courts (MDEC) System

Position: **FAVORABLE**

Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and Esteemed Members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Lauren Pruitt, and I am the Legal Director at FreeState Justice, a nonprofit organization dedicated to serving LGBTQ+ Marylanders from diverse backgrounds. I am writing in support of **HB0131**, which clarifies that an individual's refusal to disclose criminal charges that have been expunged may not be the sole basis for denying a license, permit, registration, governmental service, or admission to an educational institution.

HB0131 addresses a critical gap in Maryland's current expungement framework. While progress has been made in expungement reform, many Marylanders continue to face significant obstacles to accessing stable employment, housing, and educational opportunities. These barriers further exacerbate disparities affecting marginalized communities, especially the LGBTQ+ community, which already faces disproportionate levels of poverty, employment discrimination, and over-policing.

Expungement reform broadly would:

At FreeState Justice, we envision a Maryland where LGBTQ+ people live openly with the dignity they deserve. Facing discrimination shouldn't keep anyone from being themselves. Through pro bono legal services, policy advocacy, resource connections, and community support, FreeState works to break down those barriers so all Marylanders can thrive.

- **Advance Equity in the Legal System:** By expanding these protections, the criminal justice system takes another step toward ensuring certain offenses do not result in long-lasting punishment and a lack of access to opportunity.
- **Promote Economic Mobility:** Conviction records severely inhibit access to employment and educational opportunities. This reform will remove unnecessary barriers to accessing certain services and opportunities that will help individuals obtain stable employment and educational opportunities.

For these reasons, I strongly urge the committee to issue a favorable report for **HB0131** so Maryland can reaffirm its commitment to fairness and rehabilitation.

Sincerely,

Lauren Pruitt
Legal Director
FreeState Justice