

**HB360 - Criminal Procedure –
Automated Expungement (Clean Slate Act of 2026)**

HEARING BEFORE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

POSITION: FAVORABLE

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

Shore Legal Access respectfully requests your support for HB360, the Maryland Clean Slate Act, to reduce barriers to housing and employment for Marylanders with criminal records who have paid their debt to society. This bill would shield from public view criminal records for misdemeanors and charges already eligible for expungement under the law after a waiting period through an automated process. HB360 modernizes Maryland's out-of-date, petition-based system, thereby saving valuable legal services resources while increasing housing, employment, education, and service opportunities for all Marylanders. We thank the Committee for its support for groundbreaking reforms in recent years. Now it's time for our systems to catch up with our values.

Shore Legal Access (SLA) connects people on the Eastern Shore with limited financial means to legal representation and essential community resources. Each year, SLA helps over 3,0000 people in our community access the legal system when they would otherwise be shut out. Our small legal team and network of volunteer lawyers provide free legal services for eviction prevention, criminal record expungement, life and estate planning, family law, foreclosure, and consumer debt. These services help families gain financial and housing stability and give people hope and agency over their future.

SLA serves 8 Eastern Shore counties and has helped hundreds of people on the Eastern Shore to get their records cleared. But we've only scratched the surface of the need – 407,000 Marylanders have records that could be shielded from public view right now. The current process should be simple. But it's not, and that's why only 2% of people who are eligible for record expungement actually file petitions.

Maryland places the burden on people who have already paid their debt to society and have met all of the criteria for their record to no longer be visible to the public. The person must know they are eligible, understand the eligibility rules, and know how to navigate the court's petition procedure. The forms are confusing and can be rejected for simple mistakes or missing information. Maryland's system is based on an era of paper filing and slow information that no longer exists.



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MAIN OFFICE | EASTON

499 Idlewild Avenue
Suite 102
Easton, MD 21601

SALISBURY OFFICE

4601-B E. Naylor Mill Road
Salisbury, MD 21804

p 410.690.8128

f 443.385.0210

shorelegal.org

For those with eligible records who find their way to our organization, SLA's attorneys provide the necessary research and document preparation, then file the expungement petitions on our client's behalf. An automated process would relieve the volume of cases we handle, allowing our limited legal staff to focus on the more complex situations.

The people coming to us for help with record expungement are extraordinary and resilient. Many are under employed, others have invested deeply in education but then were denied employment due to their past record. One recent client who had experienced homelessness as result of not being able to secure housing described having a transformative moment of hope and elation after obtaining expungement of old records from a life they had long left behind. He's now working at a nursing home where he provides vital care for older adults in his community. This client is representative of so many underemployed Marylanders who have already turned their lives around.

Maryland should be leading the way on criminal justice reform, but instead, our antiquated technology and over reliance on an ineffective petition-based system results in unnecessary barriers to the basic things that people need to thrive. Thirteen states and Washington, DC have already adopted automated record shielding systems. Pennsylvania, one of the first states to automate record shielding, made a smart \$3 million investment in technology that will result in sealing a staggering 36 million records. Colorado spent \$2.6 million on administrative and technological upgrades to begin the process of shielding 1 million eligible records. Other states with similar judicial records systems have done it with a modest investment in staffing and resources.

The impact is big – national studies show that when people are able to get their records shielded, they see a 22% increase in income. That means better lives for families, more tax revenue, and stronger communities. We ask for your support for HB360 to help Maryland families move forward now. For more information about our position, please feel free to reach out to Meredith Girard, Esq., Executive Director, at: mgirard@shorelegal.org, 410-690-8128.

