



JUSTICE FOR ALL

MARYLAND HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
TESTIMONY OF MARYLAND VOLUNTEER LAWYERS SERVICE
**IN SUPPORT OF HB0169: CRIMINAL PROCEDURE –
EXPUNGEMENT OF RECORDS – GOOD CAUSE**
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 0169. 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 0169.

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.

HB0169 would establish factors by which a person with a criminal record can petition the courts for an expungement based on good cause. Currently, good cause expungement is limited to early expungements for non-convictions only. This bill is carefully tailored to create a process with reasonable boundaries on good cause expansion. Most importantly, this bill entrusts our courts to determine that a person has been rehabilitated and can move forward in life after living with the consequences of a criminal record.

Our current laws allow for the expungement of many misdemeanor convictions, and a few felonies. But the limitations of the current statute leave many people with permanent criminal records, often for nonviolent misdemeanors that were simply missed in drafting the existing law. Here are some examples of the inconsistencies in the law.

We allow for expungement of illicit drug possession, but not for obtaining prescription drugs fraudulently – a policy that harshly impacts victims of the opioid crisis.

We allow for expungement of open container, but not for drinking in public. Many common citations like this have county-level laws that are not captured by the statute as-written.

We allow for expungement of the charge “trespassing on posted property” but not “trespassing on private property.”

We do not allow expungement of a citation for riding a bike on the sidewalk, yet we’ve included several felony convictions in the statute.

Each low-level offense not captured by the statute compounds into permanent criminal records for offenses otherwise deemed eligible, since a subsequent conviction will block a prior case from being expunged.

Beyond that, the current statute simply does not allow for any avenue by which a person can present their case to the courts if they feel they deserve expungement for a non-eligible case. Certainly there are some egregious crimes for which expungement is unwarranted, but just as certainly there are Marylanders who have been held back for decades by their criminal record despite every effort to rehabilitate and become contributing members of society. This bill would allow those people a chance to argue their case before a court. As it stands, such people have zero opportunity for redress.

Importantly, this bill authorizes expungement of convictions only after the completion of sentence, including incarceration, parole, and/or probation. Someone who has served their time according to the lengths deemed just by our courts need not be punished again when they apply for a job years or even decades later. Maryland should not be a state where people are forever defined by their worst moments.

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. HB0169 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 0169.

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