



**JUSTICE FOR ALL**

MARYLAND HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE  
TESTIMONY OF MARYLAND VOLUNTEER LAWYERS SERVICE

**IN SUPPORT OF HB0819:**  
**COMMISSION TO EXAMINE THE EXPUNGEMENT LAWS OF MARYLAND**  
**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 0819. 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 0819.

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.

HB0819 continues the important work this legislature has done over the past decade to advance justice for those who live with a criminal record. Many pieces of legislation, including the Justice Reinvestment Act, the REDEEM Act, and the Expungement Reform Act of 2025, have provided critical relief for Marylanders burdened by a criminal record. But existing laws still allow many people to fall through the cracks, and leave them with a permanent record for low-level offenses.

In particular, the list of eligible convictions found in Criminal Procedure 10-110 omits many nonviolent misdemeanors and results in unjust outcomes. To provide some examples: 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.

Most concerningly, 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.

Without a careful examination of the gaps in the current statute, hundreds of Marylanders languish with the consequences of a criminal record – denial of access to housing, inability to find stable employment, child custody and parental rights issues, social stigma, and more. All of this for largely nonviolent misdemeanor offenses that were omitted from the statute.

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. HB0819 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 0819.

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