

Friday, February 27, 2026



Showing Up for Racial Justice

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee,

I am submitting this testimony as a member of Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) Baltimore, a group of individuals working to mobilize white people in a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. We are also working in collaboration with Out for Justice, which advocates for the reform of policies and practices that adversely affect incarcerated people's successful reintegration into society. I am a resident of Baltimore City and District 41. I am testifying **in support of HB0824 Criminal Procedure - Expungement - Conviction of Distribution of Controlled Dangerous Substance.**

Criminal record expungement can be positively life-altering—even life-saving—and in Maryland, it is also rare. Only 9% of crimes are eligible for expungement, and only a tiny percentage of Marylanders whose convictions are eligible for expungement—less than 10%—actually get their records expunged within 5 years of becoming eligible.

Lack of access to expungement has potentially devastating and lifelong impacts for previously convicted individuals. Having a criminal record can lead to people in effect being punished for their offenses long after they've served their debt to society; previously convicted individuals with criminal records can have difficulty getting employment, housing, certifications and licenses, and access to other resources that are critically necessary to re-integrate into their communities and be a full-fledged member of society. Those who have met the requirements of their sentence including probation, parole, fines, and community service should have the opportunity to full rejoin society and move on with their lives, free of the stigma of past convictions.

HB0824 offers a seemingly minor yet still meaningful and constructive step toward increasing the fairness, equitability, and restorative potential of Maryland criminal law.

Under Maryland law, possession of a controlled substance with intent to distribute is an expungable offense. However, distribution of a controlled substance is **not** currently an expungable offense. It simply does not make sense that these two highly similar offenses are treated so differently—and with such serious long-term consequences in the case of distribution charges—under Maryland law. If lawmakers have determined that individuals previously convicted with intent to distribute should have access to expungement, then so should individuals previously convicted with distribution. This bill proposes making intent to distribute a controlled substance an expungable crime.

If passed, HB0824 will change nothing else about how these two charges are treated under Maryland law. Both of these charges would still be considered crimes. Once a person is convicted of drug distribution, they will still have to serve their complete sentence. This bill would not change the penalties for these offenses. What the bill would do is simply ensure that a person who has completed their sentence for this particular crime will not have to continue suffering undue consequences for the remainder of their life.

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote **in support of HB0824 Criminal Procedure - Expungement - Conviction of Distribution of Controlled Dangerous Substance.**

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,
Dr. Katherine Blaha
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Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) Baltimore