

HEALTH CARE FOR THE HOMELESS TESTIMONY
IN SUPPORT OF
SB 37 - Criminal Procedure - Expungement of Records - Waiting
Periods (REDEEM Act of 2023)

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 2, 2023



Health Care for the Homeless supports SB 37, which will reduce the expungement waiting periods for misdemeanors and non-violent felonies. In Maryland, an expungement is only available after the completion of the sentence, parole, probation, substance use disorder treatment, and any other form of supervision. Once a person has fully completed their time served, they must then wait another 10-15 more years before having a conviction expunged, if the charge is even eligible for expungement. Passage of this bill will have a significant impact on increasing access to employment and housing services.

SB 37 helps end homelessness by reducing barriers to employment and housing. Criminal records, including records of misdemeanors and other non-violent crimes, create almost insurmountable barriers to obtaining employment, housing, education, and other critical resources like social safety net programs. In a 2011 Health Care for the Homeless study, which surveyed 429 people who had been released from jail or prison within the past 10 years, respondents most frequently cited the inability to find work (57%) and a criminal record (56%) as the barriers preventing them from accessing stable housing. As a supportive housing services provider, we see the direct impact that a criminal record can have on an individual's ability to obtain housing. HB 97 serves to directly eliminate such barriers to housing.

As part of our health care services, Health Care for the Homeless provides permanent supportive housing to over 400 people. As such, we work closely with local housing authorities and see firsthand how convictions can explicitly prevent someone experiencing homelessness to be housed. For instance, the Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC) will deny eligibility for admission for a period of 18 months for a misdemeanor conviction and for a period of three years for a felony conviction beginning on the date of conviction or the release from incarceration, whichever is later. Therefore, the ability to shorten the waiting period before expungements for misdemeanors and certain felonies will have a significant impact in providing greater and more expedited housing opportunities for our clients.

We urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 37.

Health Care for the Homeless is Maryland's leading provider of integrated health services and supportive housing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. Our mission is to end homelessness through racially equitable health care, housing and advocacy in partnership with those of us who have experienced it. We deliver medical care, mental health services, state-certified addiction treatment, dental care, social services, housing and housing support services for over 10,000 Marylanders annually in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. For more information, visit www.hchmd.org.