



MARYLAND
LEGAL AID

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For Immediate Release

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Maryland Legal Aid's *Community Lawyering Initiative* predicts more clients will seek assistance in light of new Maryland expungement laws

BALTIMORE, Md., (September 29, 2017) – Maryland Legal Aid's *Community Lawyering Initiative* predicts that the new Maryland expungement laws, set to go into effect on October 1, 2017, will result in more individuals seeking assistance for expungement of their criminal records. Under the Maryland Justice Reinvestment Act, these new laws include a number of provisions which focus on expungements for misdemeanor offenses.

"Attendance at our legal clinics is expected to skyrocket as word gets out," said Amy Petkovsek, Director of Advocacy for Training and Pro Bono at Maryland Legal Aid. "Under these new laws, many more Marylanders will be eligible for expungement of their records, which will open up new employment and housing opportunities to thousands."

The Maryland Justice Reinvestment Act seeks to reduce Maryland's prison population and to use the cost savings to provide more effective treatment for offenders-- before, during, and after incarceration. One overarching goal of the Act is to reduce the likelihood of individuals becoming repeat offenders.

Maryland Legal Aid's *Community Lawyering Initiative* was established in 2015 in response to the community's increasing need for criminal record expungements to remove barriers to obtaining employment, housing, child custody, and driver's licenses. The *Initiative* grew out of Maryland Legal Aid's *Lawyer in the Library* program, where attorneys are placed weekly in public libraries across the state to provide legal information to visitors. In the last three months alone, *Initiative* staff have assisted close to 900 people and expunged more than 1,000 cases from people's criminal records.

Currently, the *Community Lawyering Initiative* holds 30-35 clinics each month at various locations in collaboration with a number of community partners, including Enoch Pratt Free Library; libraries in Baltimore County, Carroll, Frederick, Montgomery, and Washington counties; Goodwill Industries of the Chesapeake; Johns Hopkins Center for Health and Learning; Native American Lifelines; Men and Families Center; Living Classrooms; and One Stop Career Centers across the state.

In preparation for an influx of clients seeking expungement help, ExpungedMD.org—the free, user-friendly website for record expungements that Maryland Legal Aid launched last year—has been updated to generate revised expungement petitions and to automatically detect which petition a user needs for *not guilty* and *guilty* dispositions.

Additionally, Maryland Legal Aid's *Community Lawyering Initiative* established a new Community Lawyering Pro Bono panel, which includes pro bono attorneys who provide brief advice and extended representation to assigned clients. "All Maryland-barred attorneys interested in assisting clients pro bono, either at one of our many *Community Lawyering Initiative* clinics, or by joining our Pro Bono panel, are welcome," said Petkovsek. "Maryland Legal Aid has been fortunate to have attorneys from PayPal and Ballard Spahr partner with us at our *Lawyer in the Library* clinics. We hope to increase the number of pro bono attorneys interested in being part of an effort to give low-income people a fair chance at receiving justice."

For more information about Maryland Legal Aid's *Community Lawyering Initiative* and the Community Lawyering Pro Bono panel, contact XXXXXX at XXXXX.

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About Maryland Legal Aid

Maryland Legal Aid is a private, non-profit law firm that provides free, civil legal services to people who are in Baltimore City and Maryland's 23 counties from 12 offices. The firm handles cases involving a wide range of issues, including family, housing, government benefits, healthcare, education, employment, and consumer law. Maryland Legal Aid also represents children in CINA (Child in Need of Assistance) proceedings in 12 Maryland jurisdictions. Other vulnerable populations, such as homeowners facing foreclosure, migrant and seasonal farm workers, nursing home and assisted living residents, and veterans seeking benefits and assistance with related legal issues also receive representation through special projects. In addition, Maryland Legal Aid assists with expunging criminal records to remove barriers to obtaining housing, employment, and child custody.

For more information, visit www.mdlab.org and follow Maryland Legal Aid on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).