

# Maryland Senate passes expungement bill

*By Leonard Sparks  
Special to Sentinel-Voice*  
BALTIMORE (NNPA) - By a unanimous vote on April 3, the Maryland state Senate joined the House of Delegates in ratifying a bill that will grant automatic expungement to the thousands of people arrested and released without being

charged each year. The bill, which the governor is expected to sign, requires that law enforcement agencies bar from public inspection the record, including photographs and fingerprints, of any arrest that does not result in formal charges. Baltimore City Del. Keith E. Haynes said his automatic

expungement bill is a remedy for people "caught up in this unjust system." It also ends a longstanding practice that required that those seeking expungements either wait until the three-year statute of limitations on lawsuits expired or sign a form rescinding their right to sue.

Baltimore City Del. Keith E. Haynes, who sponsored the legislation and shepherded it through the Legislature, called the changes a victory for civil rights. "It's a great day for those individuals that have been caught up in this unjust system," Haynes said. "I'm very

ecstatic about it." The new process would apply to any arrest after the Oct. 1 effective date of bill, and eight years prior. Within 60 days of an arrestee's release, law enforcement agencies would have to complete the expungement process, which includes notifying the state's central repository for criminal records and any other law enforcement agency with a record of the arrest.

According to the Maryland Criminal Justice Information System, 21,000 people statewide were arrested and released without charge in 2006.

In Baltimore City, which is facing a lawsuit over allegations that police officers routinely arrest people without probable cause, city prosecutors at Central Booking declined to file charges in about 24 percent — 16,287 of 67,145 — of arrests last year, according to the state's attorney's office.

Most of the cases involved "quality-of-life" crimes like loitering, disorderly conduct and possessing an open container. But among the cases were 3,417 drug arrests in which pros-

ecutors decided that the evidence was insufficient.

The state's attorney's office said the average number of cases reviewed each month at Central Booking has increased from about 3,000 to 5,600, with a high of 8,964 in August 2005.

"We should have had automatic expungement for these types of arrests initially," Haynes said. "I think this bill corrects a longstanding injustice."

Cindy Boersma, legislative director for the American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland, said that the arrests without charges are "worse" than a conviction because of the absence of a disposition.

"It just creates this big mystery," she said. "It doesn't show that you were released without charges."

The impact of an arrest, Boersma said, reverberates long after a person's release, affecting employment and housing opportunities.

"This was to make sure that an arrest doesn't go on to prevent you from having a life," she said. "It was a really important bill."

*Leonard Sparks writes for Afro-American Newspapers.*

## Info needed on cervical cancer

*By Ahkiah Allen  
Special to Sentinel-Voice*  
African-American women may be dying in higher rates from cervical cancer because of a lack of education about human papilloma virus (HPV), says a physician of the American Cancer Society.

"There's so many factors that kind of come into play," said Dr. Columbus Giles of the American Cancer Society's Leadership Council. "For African-Americans there are issues concerning how sexual education is discussed and handled."

The information many adolescents and young adults are receiving from churches and other community organizations is not always complete, in part, because they are failing to promote both abstinence and safe sex practices, which medical experts say are the best prevention methods to avoid HPV, a virus proven to lead to cervical cancer.

In a 2002-2003 ACS study, African-American women led national cervical cancer death rates.

It reports that 5 out of 100,000 African-American women died from the disease during this time frame. For

Hispanic women, that number was 3.4 per 100,000, compared to 2.4 per 100,000 White women.

The national incidence of cervical cancer in 2002-2003 shows 8.5 per 100,000 of White women. For African-American women, that number was 11.5 per 100,000, and for Hispanic women, 14.2 per 100,000.

"Culturally, if we can get through to the churches, civic groups and families" the right information can be facilitated to African-American and Hispanic women, Giles said. "The biggest part of treatment is educating on how to prevent contracting [HPV]."

Human papillomavirus is the most common sexually transmitted infection in the United States. HPV is so prevalent that, according to the American Cancer Society, up to 80 percent of sexually active men and women will acquire the disease at some point during their lifetime.

HPV has been detected in 90 percent to 100 percent of all cervical cancer cases. About 20 million people are currently infected with the virus, with 6.2 million new genital HPV infections hap-

pening each year.

ACS projects that in 2007 there were 11,150 new cases of cervical cancer and 3,670 deaths from cervical cancer will arise. The Pap test is a key tool in early HPV detection and cervical cancer prevention. But many patients are not utilizing this measure as often as they should. Between 60 and 80 percent of women diagnosed with cervical cancer have not had a routine Pap smear in the last five years. Nearly 50 percent of women who die from cervical cancer have never had a Pap test.

According to Giles, this is partially related to general access to health care.

"Insurance is extremely expensive" and education is not enough when one cannot "afford to get Pap tests, mammograms," and other cancer detection tools, he said.

A preventative injection, Gardasil, has been widely publicized this year. Although there are opponents who say the vaccine is new and yet to be proven in public use over a long period of decades, the vaccine is considered by many to be a first-rate contender for the diseases caused by HPV.

## Internet

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incentive to encourage these young people to stay in school [and] focus on their math and science."

While the Digital Career Academies seek to improve familiarity with computers, they also alert participants of how integral computers and the Internet are in everyday life.

"Internet now has become a way of life," said Crawford. "Providing information for people would help them to know what resources they can get to. When they begin to learn how the computers can affect their lives, it causes them to hopefully seek out more information."

John Muleta, founder and

CEO of M2Z Networks, agrees with the importance of quality Internet access. For that reason, his Menlo Park, California-based company submitted a proposal to the Federal Communications Commission in May 2006 to construct a free broadband network nationwide that would connect 95 percent of Americans within 10 years.

"There's no requirement that broadband be available everywhere," Muleta said. "It's very expensive and it's not available everywhere."

If the FCC accepts the proposal, M2Z Networks would set up an entirely advertiser-supported broadband network that could instantly make Web use much

more efficient for those with slow connection speeds or no access to the Internet.

"The concern I have as an African-American," said Muleta, "is that our community is the one that's being left out because there's no incentive for the other folks to build in our neighborhoods."

But, what about those who don't have computers or Internet-ready devices? Says Crawford, "We can encourage and solicit businesses in the areas of computers and technology to make computers available to people or provide them access."

*John Kennedy writes for the Howard University News Service.*

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