

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2024 REGULAR SESSION

Introduced

House Bill 4179

By Delegate Pushkin

[Introduced January 10, 2024; Referred
to the Committee on the Judiciary]

1 A BILL to amend and reenact §61-11-26 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, relating
2 to the removal of limitations on the expungement of certain criminal convictions.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

ARTICLE 11. GENERAL PROVISIONS CONCERNING CRIMES.

§61-11-26. Expungement of certain criminal convictions; procedures; effect.

1 (a) *Eligibility for expungement.* —

2 (1) *Misdemeanors.* —

3 Subject to the limitations set forth in this section, a person convicted of a misdemeanor
4 offense or offenses may, pursuant to the provisions of this section, petition the circuit court in which
5 the conviction or convictions occurred for expungement of the conviction or convictions and the
6 records associated with the conviction or convictions.

7 (2) *Nonviolent felonies.* —

8 Subject to the limitations set forth in this section, a person convicted of a nonviolent felony
9 offense or offenses arising from the same transaction or series of transactions may, pursuant to
10 the provisions of this section, petition the circuit court in which the conviction or convictions
11 occurred for expungement of the conviction or convictions and the records associated with the
12 conviction or convictions.

13 (b) *Temporal requirements.* —

14 (1) *Misdemeanor.* — A person is not eligible for expungement pursuant to subdivision (1),
15 subsection (a) of this section until one year after conviction, completion of any sentence of
16 incarceration, or completion of any period of supervision, whichever is later in time.

17 (2) *More than one misdemeanor.* — A person is not eligible for expungement of multiple
18 misdemeanors pursuant to subdivision (1), subsection (a) of this section until two years after the
19 last conviction, completion of any sentence of incarceration, or completion of any period of
20 supervision ordered for the last conviction, whichever is later in time.

21 (3) *Nonviolent felonies.* — A person is not eligible for expungement of a nonviolent felony

22 pursuant to subdivision (2), subsection (a) of this section until five years after conviction,
23 completion of any sentence of incarceration or completion of any period of supervision, whichever
24 is later in time.

25 (c) *Limitations on eligibility for expungement.* — A person is not eligible for expungement
26 pursuant to subsection (a) of this section for convictions of the following offenses:

27 (1) Any felony offense of violence against the person as defined in subdivision (2),
28 subsection (p) of this section or any misdemeanor offense involving the intentional infliction of
29 physical injury to a minor or law-enforcement officer;

30 (2) Any felony offense in which the victim of the crime was a minor as defined in subdivision
31 (3), subsection (p) of this section;

32 (3) Any violation of §61-8B-1 *et seq.* of this code;

33 (4) Any offense in which the petitioner used or exhibited a deadly weapon or dangerous
34 instrument;

35 (5) Any violation of §61-2-28 of this code, or any offense which violates §61-2-9(b) or §61-
36 2-9(c) of this code in which the victim was a spouse, a person with whom the person seeking
37 expungement had a child in common, or with whom the person seeking expungement ever
38 cohabited prior to the offense or a violation of §61-2-28(c) of this code;

39 (6) Any violation of §61-2-29 of this code;

40 (7) Any offense of driving under the influence of alcohol or a controlled substance;

41 (8) Any offense which violates §17B-4-3 of this code;

42 (9) Any offense which violates §61-8-12 or §61-8-19 of this code;

43 (10) Any violation of §61-2-9a of this code;

44 (11) Any violation of §61-8B-8 and §61-8B-9 of this code;

45 ~~(12) Any violation of §61-3-11 of this code involving a structure regularly used as a~~
46 ~~dwelling;~~

47 ~~(13)~~ (12) Any conviction for which the sentencing judge made a written finding that the

48 offense was sexually motivated;

49 ~~(14)~~ (13) Any offense which violates §17E-1-13(g) of this code; and

50 ~~(15)~~ (14) Any offense of conspiracy or attempt to commit a felony set forth in subdivisions

51 (1) through ~~(13)~~ (12), inclusive, of this subsection: *Provided*, That a conviction for driving under

52 the influence of alcohol, controlled substances, or drugs shall not preclude expungement of an

53 unrelated and otherwise expungable felony if the conviction for driving under the influence of

54 alcohol, controlled substances, or drugs is at least five years old at the time the petition for

55 expungement is filed.

56 (d) *Content of petition for expungements.* — Each petition to expunge a conviction or

57 convictions pursuant to this section shall be verified under oath and include the following

58 information: *Provided*, That a petition for the expungement of multiple misdemeanors shall identify

59 and group such information by circuit court, as applicable, from which expungement of a particular

60 conviction or convictions is being sought:

61 (1) The petitioner's current name and all other legal names or aliases by which the

62 petitioner has been known at any time;

63 (2) All of the petitioner's addresses from the date of the offense in connection with which an

64 expungement order is sought to date of the petition;

65 (3) The petitioner's date of birth and Social Security number;

66 (4) The petitioner's date of arrest, the court of jurisdiction, and criminal complaint,

67 indictment, summons, or case number;

68 (5) The statute or statutes and offense or offenses for which the petitioner was charged and

69 of which the petitioner was convicted;

70 (6) The names of any victim or victims, or a statement that there were no identifiable

71 victims;

72 (7) Whether there is any current order for restitution, protection, restraining order, or other

73 no contact order prohibiting the petitioner from contacting the victims or whether there has ever

74 been a prior order for restitution, protection, or restraining order prohibiting the petitioner from
75 contacting the victim. If there is a current order, the petitioner shall attach a copy of that order to his
76 or her petition;

77 (8) The disposition of the matter and sentence imposed, if any;

78 (9) The grounds on which expungement is sought, including, but not limited to,
79 employment or licensure purposes;

80 (10) The steps the petitioner has taken since the time of the offense or offenses toward
81 personal rehabilitation, including treatment, work, or other personal history that demonstrates
82 rehabilitation;

83 (11) Whether petitioner has ever been granted expungement or similar relief regarding a
84 criminal conviction by any court in this state, by the court of any other state, or by any federal court;

85 (12) Any supporting documents, sworn statements, affidavits, or other information
86 supporting the petition for expungement.

87 (e) *Service of petition for expungement.* — The petitioner shall serve a copy of the petition,
88 with any supporting documentation, pursuant to the rules of the trial court upon the following
89 persons or entities:

90 (1) The Superintendent of the State Police;

91 (2) The prosecuting attorney of the county or counties of conviction;

92 (3) The chief law-enforcement officer of the law-enforcement agency which arrested the
93 petitioner;

94 (4) The superintendent, warden, or the commissioner of corrections of any institution in
95 which the petitioner was confined or imprisoned pursuant to the conviction; ~~and~~

96 (5) The superintendent or warden of any institution in which the petitioner was confined;
97 and

98 ~~(5)~~(6) The circuit court, magistrate court, or municipal court which disposed of the
99 petitioner's criminal charge.

100 (f) The prosecuting attorney of the county in which expungement is sought shall serve the
101 petition for expungement, accompanying documentation, and any proposed expungement order
102 by first class mail to any identified victims.

103 (g) *Notice of opposition.* —

104 (1) Upon receipt of a petition for expungement, the persons and entities listed in subsection
105 (e) of this section, and any other interested person or agency that desires to oppose the
106 expungement may, within 30 days of receipt of the petition, file a notice of opposition with the court
107 with supporting documentation and sworn statements setting forth the reasons for resisting the
108 petition for expungement.

109 (2) A copy of any notice of opposition with supporting documentation and sworn
110 statements shall be served upon the petitioner in accordance with trial court rules.

111 (3) The petitioner may file a reply to a notice of opposition no later than 30 days after
112 service of any notice of opposition to the petition for expungement.

113 (h) *Burden of proof.* — The burden of proof shall be on the petitioner seeking an order of
114 expungement to prove by clear and convincing evidence:

115 (1) That the conviction or convictions for which expungement is sought are the only
116 convictions for that specified offense or offenses against the petitioner in this state and that the
117 conviction or convictions are not excluded from expungement by the provisions of this section;

118 (2) That the requisite time has passed since the conviction or convictions or the completion
119 of any sentence of ~~incarceration~~ confinement or period of supervision as set forth in subsection (b)
120 of this section;

121 (3) That the petitioner has no criminal charges pending against him or her;

122 (4) That the expungement is consistent with the public welfare;

123 (5) That the petitioner has, by his or her behavior since the conviction or convictions,
124 evidenced that he or she has been rehabilitated and is law-abiding; and

125 (6) Any other facts considered appropriate or necessary by the court to make a

126 determination regarding the petition for expungement.

127 (i) *Court procedure for petition for expungement.* —

128 Within 60 days of the filing of a petition for expungement the circuit court shall:

129 (1) Summarily grant the petition;

130 (2) Return the petition to the petitioner to supply incomplete information or correct obvious
131 errors in order to permit consideration of the petition on its merits;

132 (3) Set the matter for hearing; or

133 (4) Summarily deny the petition if the court determines that the petition is insufficient or,
134 based upon supporting documentation and sworn statements filed in opposition to the petition, the
135 court determines that the petitioner, as a matter of law, is not entitled to expungement.

136 (j) *Hearing on petition for expungement.* —

137 If the court sets the matter for hearing, all interested parties who have filed a notice of
138 opposition shall be notified. At the hearing, the court may inquire into the background of the
139 petitioner and shall have access to any reports or records relating to the petitioner that are on file
140 with any law-enforcement authority, the institution of confinement, if any, and parole authority or
141 other agency which was in any way involved with the petitioner's arrest, conviction, sentence, and
142 post-conviction supervision, including any record of arrest or conviction in any other state or
143 federal court. The court may hear testimony of witnesses and any other matter the court considers
144 proper and relevant to its determination regarding the petition. The court shall enter an order
145 reflecting its ruling on the petition for expungement with appropriate findings of fact and
146 conclusions of law.

147 (k) *Sealing of records.* — If the court grants the petition for expungement, it shall order the
148 sealing of all records in the custody of the court and expungement of any records in the custody of
149 any other agency or official, including law-enforcement records. Every agency with records
150 relating to the arrest, charge, or other matters arising out of the arrest or conviction that is ordered
151 to expunge records shall certify to the court within 60 days of the entry of the expungement order

152 that the required expungement has been completed. All orders enforcing the expungement
153 procedure shall also be sealed.

154 (l) *Disclosure of expunged matters.* —

155 (1) Subject to the exceptions set forth in this section, upon expungement, the proceedings
156 in the matter shall be considered, as a matter of law, never to have occurred. The court and other
157 agencies shall reply to any inquiry that no record exists on the matter. The person whose record is
158 expunged shall not have to disclose the fact of the record or any matter relating to the record on an
159 application for employment, credit, or other type of application: *Provided*, That any person
160 applying for a position in which he or she would be engaging in the prevention, detection,
161 investigation, prosecution, or ~~incarceration~~ confinement of persons for violations of the law shall
162 disclose any and all convictions to his or her prospective employer, regardless of whether the
163 conviction or convictions have been expunged pursuant to this section.

164 (2) A person for whom an order of expungement has been entered pursuant to this section
165 may not be found guilty of perjury or otherwise giving a false statement, under any provision of this
166 code, because of that person's failure to recite or acknowledge the arrest, indictment, information,
167 trial, or conviction, as long as the person is in compliance with subdivision (1) of this subsection.

168 (3) Notwithstanding any provisions of this code to the contrary, any person required by
169 state or federal law to obtain a criminal history record check on a prospective employee are
170 authorized to have knowledge of any convictions expunged under this section.

171 (m) *Inspection of sealed records.* — Inspection of the sealed records in the court's
172 possession may thereafter be permitted by the court only upon a motion by the person who is the
173 subject of the records or upon a petition filed by a prosecuting attorney that inspection and
174 possible use of the records in question are necessary to the investigation or prosecution of a crime
175 in this state or another jurisdiction. If the court finds that there is a legitimate reason for access and
176 the interests of justice will be served by granting a petition to inspect the sealed record, it may
177 grant access under the terms and conditions determined by the court.

178 (n) *Fees for filing petition for expungement and processing orders of expungement.* — The
179 clerk of the circuit court shall charge and collect in advance the same fee for a petition for
180 expungement as is charged for instituting a civil action pursuant to §59-1-11(a)(1) of this code. A
181 person obtaining an order of expungement pursuant to the provisions of this section shall pay a fee
182 of \$100 to the Records Division of the West Virginia State Police for the cost of processing the
183 order of expungement deposited into a special revenue account within the State Treasurer's office
184 to be known as the West Virginia State Police Criminal History Account.

185 ~~(o) Notwithstanding any provision of this code to the contrary, a person may only obtain the~~
186 ~~relief afforded by the provisions of this section and §61-11-26a of this code once~~

187 ~~(p)~~ (o) For the purposes of this section:

188 (1) "Court record" means an official record of a court about a proceeding that the clerk of
189 the court or other court personnel maintains. "Court record" includes an index, a docket entry, a
190 petition or other pleading, a memorandum, a transcription of proceedings, an electronic recording,
191 an order, and a judgment.

192 (2) "Expungement" means the removal from all public records, other than those specifically
193 exempted therefrom by the provisions of this section and §61-11-26a of this code, all evidence that
194 a person has been charged or convicted of a crime.

195 (3) "Felony crime of violence against the person" means those felony offenses set forth in
196 §61-2-1 *et seq.*, §61-3E-1 *et seq.*, §61-8B-1 *et seq.*, and §61-8D-1 *et seq.* of this code.

197 (4) "Felony offenses in which the victim was a minor" means felony violation of §61-3C-
198 14b, §61-8-1 *et seq.*, §61-8A-1 *et seq.*, §61-8C-1 *et seq.*, or §61-8D-1 *et seq.* of this code.

199 (5) "Nonviolent felony" means a felony that:

200 (A) Is not an offense listed in subsection (c) of this section;

201 (B) Is not an offense involving the intentional infliction of serious bodily injury;

202 (C) Is an offense the conviction of which is based on facts and circumstances of which the
203 circuit court finds to be consistent with the purposes of this article; and

204 (D) Is an offense the conviction of which the circuit court finds does not involve violence or
205 potential violence to another person or the public.

206 (6) "Records" do not include the records of the Governor, the Legislature, or the Secretary
207 of State that pertain to a grant of pardon. Records that pertain to a grant of pardon are not subject
208 to an order of expungement.

209 (7) "Seal" means removing information from public inspection in accordance with this
210 section.

211 (8) "Sealing" means:

212 (A) For a record kept in a courthouse, removing the record to a separate, secure area to
213 which persons who do not have a legitimate reason for access are denied access;

214 (B) For electronic information about a proceeding on the website maintained by a
215 magistrate court, circuit court, or the Supreme Court of Appeals, removing the record from the
216 public website; and

217 (C) For a record maintained by any law-enforcement agency, removing the record to a
218 separate, secure area to which persons who do not have a legitimate reason for access are denied
219 access.

220 ~~(e)~~ (p) *Statutory construction.* — Nothing in this section may be construed to allow a
221 person obtaining relief pursuant to this section to be eligible for reinstatement of any retirement or
222 employment benefit which he or she lost or forfeited due to the conviction or convictions
223 expunged.

224 ~~(f)~~ (q) The enactment of this section during the 2019 regular session includes the repeal of
225 the provisions of §61-11B-1 *et seq.* of this code. Any person that had a sentence reduction
226 pursuant to the provisions of §61-11B-1 *et seq.* of this code may petition the court of record to have
227 the criminal offense reduction order converted into an order of expungement. Upon verification by
228 the court that the petitioner qualifies, the court shall enter an order of expungement of the
229 petitioner's conviction.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to remove the one-time limit on the expungement of certain criminal convictions. The bill also removes burglary and conspiracy to commit burglary from the specific crimes for which eligibility for expungement is limited.

Strike-throughs indicate language that would be stricken from a heading or the present law and underscoring indicates new language that would be added.