

YOUTH LEGAL JOURNAL



For the youth,
by the youth.

Enhancing legal literacy
in the youth population.



AUGUST 2025

ISSUE 03

YES SHE DID

A champion of the Green New Deal and Medicare for All, AOC pushes policies that demand a government that works for everyone—not just the wealthy. In her first terms, she’s co-authored groundbreaking climate proposals, fought for affordable housing, and spotlighted corporate accountability in high-profile hearings. Her use of social media and direct outreach has made her one of the most recognizable figures in American politics. As a young Latina in Congress, Ocasio-Cortez has shattered glass ceilings and inspired a new generation to step into public life. Her presence signals a shift—politics no longer belongs only to the establishment, but to the people ready to rewrite the rules.

ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTES

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the youngest woman ever elected to Congress, represents New York’s 14th District. Since 2019, she’s brought unapologetic energy to the House, breaking through political norms to give working-class communities a stronger voice. Her priorities are clear: climate action, economic fairness, and social justice.



	The One Big Beautiful Bill <i>by</i> <i>Simran Singhal</i>	7
Legal Spotlight: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez		2
	Social Media Companies Not Liable for Mass Shooter <i>by Frances Pipa</i>	8
Meet the Staff		4
	John Huffington Article <i>by Lauren Miller</i>	9
Meet the Officers		5
	Maryland Reconsiders Charging Minors as Adults <i>by Blen Daniel</i>	10
Expungement Reform Act <i>by</i> <i>Amelia Lancaster</i>		6
	Trump v United States <i>by</i> <i>Anna Dasgupta</i>	11



TABLE OF CONTENTS



THE STAFF

WRITERS & EDITORS

Blen Daniel

Anna Dasgupta

Amelia Lancaster

Lauren Miller

Frances Pipa

Simran Singhal

**VISIT OUR WEBSITE TO JOIN OUR
TEAM AS A DEPUTY!**

www.youthlegaljournal.com

PRESIDENT

Aditya Kumar

VICE PRESIDENT

Hannah Thomas

DESIGNERS

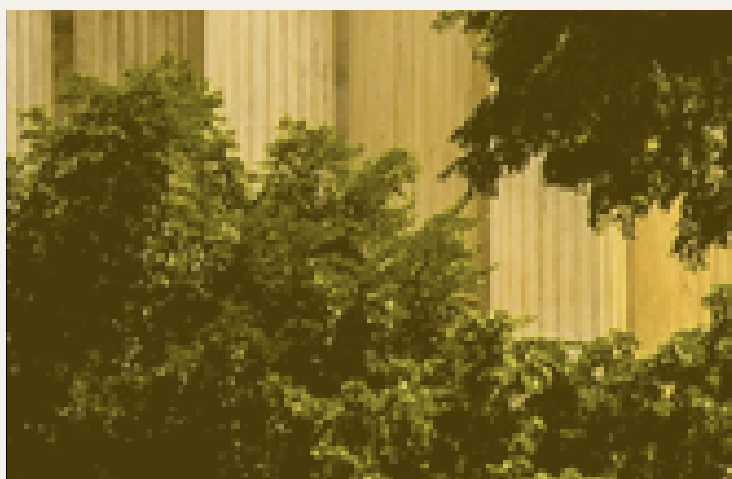
Ruth Bahn

Hannah Thomas

Isabel Woldeab

Sophie Wen

Cayla Yang



THE OFFICERS

Aditya Kumar is a senior at Clarksburg High School. He founded this organization to spread law literacy better, especially due to the lack of matters related to law in Montgomery County. Outside of Youth Legal Journal, he takes part in Asian-American advocacy, playing badminton, and he loves listening to music. Aditya is so excited to work with the board this year.

ADITYA KUMAR



Hannah is a senior at Clarksburg High School. She believes that law literacy is a necessary skill for young citizens and joined this organization to spread awareness about prevalent legal issues and encourage civil participation in her peers. Outside of Youth Legal Journal, Hannah dedicates time toward music programs and loves to read and learn.

HANNAH THOMAS



BY AMELIA LANCASTER

EXPUNGEMENT REFORM ACT

On April 22, 2025, the Expungement Reform Act was passed in Maryland and enacted as Senate Bill 432. This law seeks to address the long-term consequences and systemic barriers faced by people with a criminal record, especially those who have successfully served their sentences and gone through the rehabilitation process.

According to House Speaker Adrienne Jones, this legislation is a critical step forward, particularly in a state where racial disparities in incarceration remain alarmingly high. Maryland, as she noted, “incarcerates the highest percentage of Black people in the country.” With this in mind, lawmakers are now working more intentionally to promote equity within the criminal justice system. The Expungement Reform Act reflects a growing recognition that the criminal justice system should offer pathways for redemption and reintegration once an individual’s sentence is served.

Among the provisions of this act is one allowing individuals to more easily expunge their record. Before the Expungement Reform Act was signed into law by Wes Moore, a violation of probation, such as missing a scheduled appointment or failure to pay a fine, could disqualify the offender from expunging their record, regardless of their overall successes on probation. According to Governor Moore,

“We have got to confront this myth that every sentence needs to be a life sentence. They cannot get a loan, they cannot get a home, they cannot get hired, and oftentimes, it’s because of an offense they committed years, if not decades ago!”

Now, with the passage of this act, these probation violations are not classified as an automatic barrier to expungement.

Beyond probation-related reform, this legislation also expands the list of misdemeanor convictions that can be expunged. These eligible convictions include certain traffic violations, some domestic-related crimes, and credit card theft. Additionally, it simplifies the process for expunging cannabis-related charges that have been pardoned by Governor Wes Moore. This change comes as a larger national trend towards decriminalization of certain cannabis-related charges has begun to take shape.

Furthermore, it wipes certain non-conviction records from the Maryland Judiciary Case Search, to ensure that certain cases—such as charges that have been placed on a “stet” (inactive) docket for at least three years—are no longer publicly visible. This change is important because even non-convictions can prevent people from obtaining a job, housing, or credit when visible in public databases.

The implications of this act are tremendous. A criminal record can provide a significant detriment to one’s ability to find a job, housing, and educational opportunities. By making expungement of such a record easier, this act allows people with a criminal history to be reintegrated into society following their rehabilitation. Thus, by removing the barriers to expungement, Maryland allows these people to become productive members of society, which in turn helps communities become safer and more productive. xx

This act represents a shift within the state of Maryland from a punitive justice system towards one that emphasizes rehabilitation and reintegration of former criminals. It makes the system more equitable, offering a fresh start to those who need it the most.



Following months of legal challenges to President Trump's January executive order limiting birthright citizenship, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a consequential decision on June 27, 2025. In a 6-3 ruling, the Court declined to address whether the order violates the 14th Amendment. Instead, it found that lower federal courts had overstepped their authority by issuing nationwide injunctions that blocked the policy's implementation.

Writing for the majority in *Trump v. CASA*, Justice Amy Coney Barrett emphasized that courts should provide relief only to the plaintiffs directly involved in a given case. "A plaintiff's remedy must be narrowly tailored," she wrote, arguing that the judiciary should avoid halting federal policy on a nationwide scale. The executive order is still blocked in 22 states and Washington, D.C., due to ongoing legal challenges. However, the policy might be in place in the other 28 states by July 27.

The decision carries major implications for how immigration laws and federal policies more broadly are enforced. While supporters argue the ruling reinforces judicial restraint, critics contend that it shifts significant power away from the lower courts. In a forceful dissent, Justice Sonia Sotomayor warned that the ruling could result in legal inconsistency and unequal protections across the country.

"This decision invites a fragmented and unpredictable legal landscape,"
she wrote.

Opponents of the ruling argue that it severely limits the ability of lower courts to prevent the federal government from enforcing potentially unlawful policies. Senator Chris Murphy voiced concern that, under this precedent, only the Supreme Court can now impose uniform nationwide rulings. "That's chaos," he remarked at a press briefing. On the other hand, proponents of the decision view it as a necessary boundary on judicial power. Senator John Kennedy defended the ruling, stating, "It's not the judiciary's role to second-guess every executive action. If you're upset, that's part of living in a democracy."

At the center of the legal battle remains the unresolved question of whether the executive order is constitutional. Advocacy groups such as CASA and the American Immigration Council have pledged to continue their legal challenges under the 14th Amendment. The American Constitution Society warned that the policy, if implemented unevenly, could cause "confusion, chaos, and pain" for immigrant families.

Currently, no changes to U.S. citizenship law have officially taken effect. However, with legal protections now varying by state, the national debate over birthright citizenship is far from over, with the likelihood of returning to the Supreme Court once again.

BY SIMRAN SINGHAL

THE ONE BIG BEAUTIFUL BILL ACT



SOCIAL MEDIA COMPANIES NOT LIABLE FOR MASS SHOOTER

BY FRANCES PIPA

On May 14, 2022, Payton Gendron infamously shot and killed ten Black people, injuring three more, in a targeted racist attack at Top Friendly Markets in Buffalo, New York. Gendron, a self-proclaimed white supremacist and fascist, planned this attack for months and committed the act out of purported hate for the Black community.

Gendron pled guilty to all charges in the federal death penalty case. The trial is set to move forward in 2026, but additional lawsuits were filed by the families of the victims. These lawsuits, though, were brought against various social media companies that the mass shooter interacted with. Gendron also live-streamed part of the attack on a private, invite-only server on Discord. The families alleged that these social media sites radicalized Gendron and exposed Gendron to racist conspiracy theories, prompting him to commit the mass shooting. The companies involved in the lawsuit include 4Chan, Snapchat, Discord, YouTube, Meta, and Amazon. An attorney for the plaintiffs, Matthew Bergman, explained that “[a]ll we’re saying is that these companies should have the same duty that every other company in America has — the duty to think about the dangers their product have.”

The New York District Court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, in response to which the defendants appealed the case to the Appellate Court of New York. The appellate court ruled 3-2 in favor of the defendants, finding that social media companies could not be held liable for Gendron’s crimes. The ruling was significantly driven by the Communications Decency Act, specifically Section 230 which immunizes online platforms against content posted by third parties, such as users of the platform.

In the case, the social media companies used this law to argue that as they only provided the platform for the speech, not the speech itself, they could not be held liable for it. Attorneys for the defense also included the First Amendment’s right to free speech in their arguments. Judges worried that ruling in favor of the plaintiffs would set a dangerous precedent going forward, one in which the free, competitive nature of speech online would be greatly disrupted.

Despite the outcome of the case, it introduced a pioneering legal idea focused on holding social media companies liable for the radicalizing design of their sites. Lawyers for the plaintiff focused not on whether the speech itself was protected under the First Amendment, but instead on how the algorithms purposefully push content intended to confirm and enable pre-existing biases of the user.

Similar cases such as *Force v. Facebook* and *Gonzalez v. Google* in which the courts again pointed to Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act were referenced by the plaintiffs in this lawsuit as well because judges wrote dissenting opinions in both cases condemning the overly broad application of the Communications Decency Act. This case lays the framework for a legal argument that could one day convince the court to acknowledge the culpability of social media companies in designing purposefully addictive and radicalizing algorithms.



MARYLAND MAN SEEKS JUSTICE AFTER 32 YEARS BEHIND BARS

BY LAUREN MILLER

Decades after his arrest at only 18 years old, John Huffington is suing former prosecutors and detectives in Harford County, Maryland for his wrongful conviction. Huffington spent 32 years in prison, including 10 years on death row, for a brutal double-homicide he didn't commit. His case demonstrates the harsh reality of the legal system's failures.

Court documents alleged that Huffington and Deno Kanaras bought cocaine from Joseph Hudson, who Huffington then shot several times. He then was said to have viciously stabbed and beat Hudson's girlfriend, Diane Becker, in her vehicle as her 4-year-old son slept.

Kanaras testified against Huffington, and was convicted and sentenced to life in prison for his role in Hudson's death. Huffington was convicted and sentenced to death by the gas chamber. Although the conviction was overturned by the Maryland Court of Appeals (now known as the Maryland Supreme Court), Huffington was again convicted and sentenced to death in 1984. Huffington later claimed that in this trial, his defense failed to call a key witness or investigate other witnesses, although this was not enough to overturn the second conviction. His death sentence, however, was vacated on an additional appeal, and was instead sentenced to two consecutive life terms. The 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals later upheld the convictions in 1998.

Huffington's convictions were largely based on Kanaras' testimony and hair found at the crime scene, which prosecutors claimed matched Huffington's. In 2011, however, The Washington Post discovered an FBI report that suggested the agent who performed the hair analysis may not have even tested the hair at all. Harford County State's Attorney Joseph Cassilly did not provide the 1999 report to Huffington's lawyers. In 2013, after DNA testing proved the hair was not Huffington's, his convictions were overturned after spending 32 years in prison. Huffington reluctantly entered an Alford plea – in which a defendant doesn't have to admit guilt but acknowledges the state's evidence is sufficient to convict – in 2017 rather than face a third trial.

Governor Larry Hogan pardoned Huffington in 2023, and he was later awarded \$2.9 million under a 2021 law that allows wrongly convicted people to seek financial remedy.

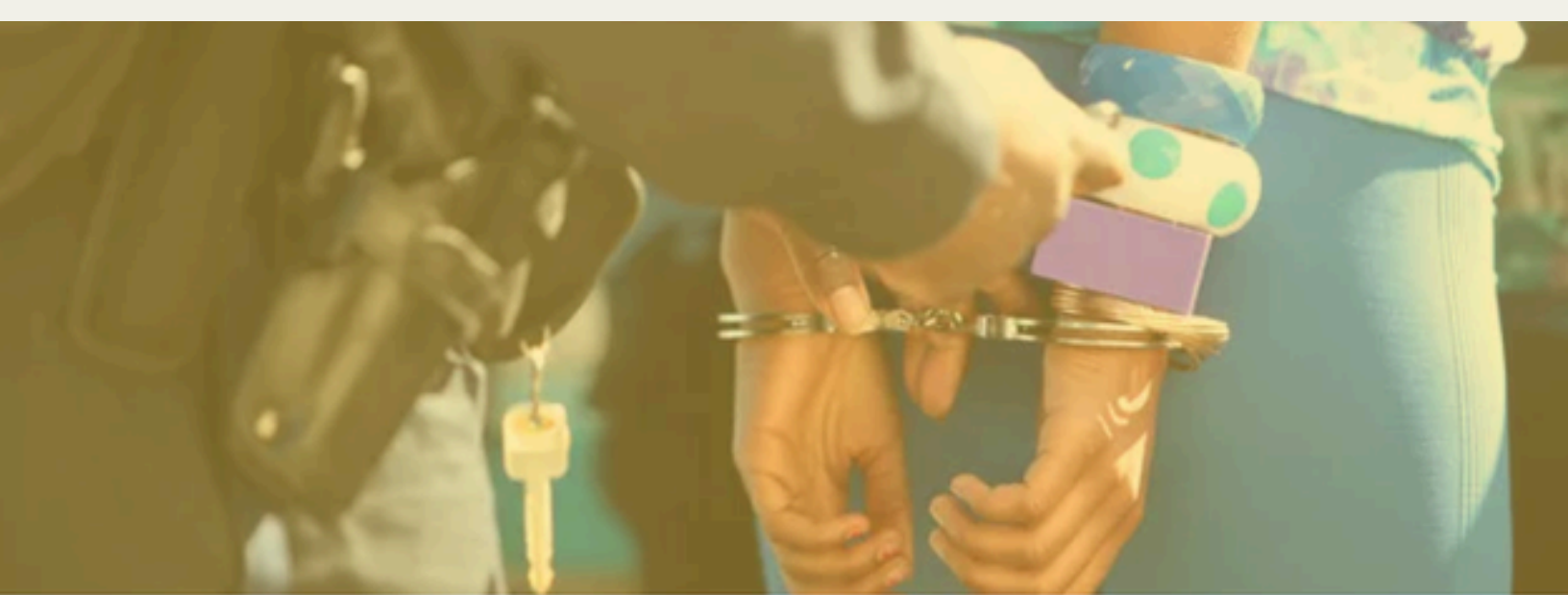
One of the most serious issues in Huffington's case was prosecutorial misconduct, meaning a prosecutor acted unethically or illegally during criminal proceedings. The Maryland Supreme Court unanimously voted to disbar Cassilly in 2021 for withholding exculpatory evidence, as not sharing the FBI report that could have exonerated Huffington was a major violation of his legal rights.

Huffington is now suing those he holds responsible for his wrongful convictions. Although Cassilly and others have passed away, his estate is named as a defendant, along with other former county prosecutors, sheriff's deputies, and Harford County itself. The lawsuit accuses law enforcement of malicious prosecution, false arrest, and fabricating evidence.

Now 62, he's working to help others who are released from prison to rebuild their lives, saying he doesn't want the years he lost to be wasted. "It takes two seconds to put you in, and 30, 40 years to get you out," Huffington said. "Sometimes the only way to fix it is to make as loud a noise and bring the most attention to it."

According to Governor Wes Moore, Huffington "serves as a reminder that our state has not always gotten it right, but we will always keep searching to make sure that we do. ...

**On behalf of the entire state of
Maryland, we are deeply, deeply sorry."**



SENATE BILL 422: MARYLAND RECONSIDERS CHARGING MINORS AS ADULTS

BY BLEN DANIEL

During Maryland's 2025 General Assembly session the Maryland Office of Public Defender (OPD) revisited the long-standing practice of automatically charging minors as adults. It is a procedure most commonly applied to minors facing charges such as carjacking, firearm possession, and robbery. In Maryland, when a minor is placed on trial there are two possible outcomes: they face judgement in an adult court, risking prison time or they are transferred to a juvenile court where the focus is rather rehabilitational. This decision ultimately rests with the judge.

One of the most common justifications for charging minors as adults is a concern for public safety. During a testimony opposing legislation reforming this procedure, Baltimore County State's Attorney, Scott Shellenberger a vocal supporter of the practice cited a 1995 case in which a school nurse was raped by a student, declaring "These are not children. These are not children!". Citizens are also worried that the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) lacks the necessary resources to rehabilitate all the minors facing charges.

Throughout the assembly's legislative session, the OPD strongly urged lawmakers to end this practice citing that Maryland ranks second only to Alabama in the number of minors between ages 14-17 being sent straight to adult courts. Robin Salter, the OPD Regional Director of Youth, emphasized that the process of automatically charging minors as adults disproportionately affects black and brown children, highlighting that while black children make up 31% of Maryland's population they make up 81% of minors charged as adults.

Despite overwhelming amounts of support for the reform to be made, no action has been taken by the General Assembly. Still, some Democratic lawmakers continue to push for change. On February 5, 2025 Senate bill 422 was introduced with the purpose of narrowing down the list of offenses that resulted in the automatic adult charging of minors to violent offenses such as murder and rape. Minors facing any other charges would begin in the juvenile system.

The goal of this reform is to end the automatic charging of minors as adults, prioritizing the rehabilitation of juveniles, and undoing Maryland's outlier ranking among other states. In a report released by the non-profit Human Rights for Kids, it was revealed that Maryland has the fourth-largest percentage of people incarcerated for crimes they committed as children. Additionally, it has been shown that under the current system black children are seven times more likely to be charged as adults compared to their white counterparts.

At the bill's initial hearing, support for the bill far outweighed opposition, with most pushback coming from state's attorneys in Baltimore City and Charles, Wicomico and Baltimore counties. These prosecutors testified that most of their concerns stemmed from doubts that the Department of Juvenile Services had the resources to help all of Maryland's juvenile defendants.

Since the initial hearing responses, some of the support has died down, with defense attorneys and other reform advocates arguing that the bill doesn't go far enough while Republicans and some prosecutors counter saying that it is too lenient.



THE EFFECTS AND CURRENT RELEVANCE OF TRUMP V. UNITED STATES

BY ANNA DASGUPTA

On July 1st of 2024, the Supreme Court held in a 6-3 decision that all former U.S. Presidents have complete immunity from prosecution of any actions taken whilst in office as long as such actions are official acts within their constitutional scope of power, and presumptive immunity from actions that are beyond the scope, but still official acts. Presidents have zero immunity from private acts that are not official nor do they pertain to a president's executive powers. Under this absolute immunity, the President's exercise of his executive authority cannot be questioned by courts nor persecuted by the law.

In August of 2023, President Donald Trump was indicted on four criminal charges of conspiracy to defraud the U.S., conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding, obstruction of and attempt to obstruct an official proceeding, and conspiracy against rights under Special Counsel Jack Smith's investigation of the January 6th attacks on the Capitol building. In response, Trump argued that he had immunity to prosecution as his actions were "official acts", meaning he would have to be impeached by the House and convicted by the Senate.

However, Trump's motion to dismiss the case on the grounds of Presidential immunity was denied on both the district and circuit levels of the District of Columbia, leading to Trump's appeal to the Supreme Court of the United States.



The key precedent in Trump v. United States was Clinton v. Jones, a 1997 Supreme Court case that held that a sitting president is not immune from prosecution for actions taken prior to his swearing into office or actions that are not official acts.

Rather than applying Clinton v. Jones directly, the courts must distinguish between the two cases, eventually deciding that immunity should exist in this specific situation as Trump's actions were "official acts". Clinton v. Jones was also reinforced in this ruling as the decision maintained the precedent that all presidents, former or current, do not hold immunity for their private actions.

The majority opinion claimed that courts do not have the authority to question a president's "core constitutional powers" such as pardons and vetoes, as it is a violation of the Separation of Powers. Further, it was argued that fear of prosecution may hinder a president's decision making abilities, weakening the strong executive power outlined in the Constitution. The dissenting opinion however, argued that no one, even the President, is not above the law and should not be treated as such, as such actions resemble a monarchy. Further, the dissenting justices argued that vast executive power gives way for presidents to commit dangerous and unconstitutional acts that cannot be checked by the law.

But why is this ruling specifically important a year later?

On July 22nd of 2025, President Trump accused former president Barack Obama of being a "ringleader" of alleged efforts by the U.S. Intelligence Agency to "steal" the 2016 election from him, claiming Obama committed treason through Russia's interference with the election.

The truth behind Trump's accusations has not been affirmed or denied yet, but it is likely that if a case is brought against Obama, he will be able to declare immunity under the ruling of Trump v. United States. As the ruling shields all former presidents from criminal prosecution, true or not, as long as his alleged actions were official and in line with his executive power, Obama would be exempt from prosecution.

WWW.YOUTHLEGALJOURNAL.COM
@YOUTHLEGALJOURNAL

INTERESTED IN WRITING ARTICLES?



GET INVOLVED TODAY!

Check out the Youth Legal Journal deputy applications on our official website to get involved in writing articles, managing internal affairs, or playing a part in managing our Instagram!

VISIT OUR INSTAGRAM

Take a look at our infographics summarizing some of the most recent legal news!

