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UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

March 6, 2020

The Honorable Luke Clippinger
Chairman, House Judiciary Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
House Office Building, Room 101
6 Bladen Street, Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chairman Clippinger:

Thank you for your leadership on criminal justice reform efforts. I write today in support of HB1166, "Public Safety - Law Enforcement Diversion Programs," which would authorize law enforcement officers to direct justice-impacted individuals out of the criminal justice system and into more appropriate pretrial diversion programs to meet their needs. Such programs are particularly important for those experiencing substance use disorder or behavioral health issues.

Our long-term goals should be to reduce our nation's staggering incarceration rate and to provide care to individuals with mental health issues. A conviction history is a significant obstacle to a meaningful and fulfilling life; data show that a criminal record makes an employer almost half as likely to call an applicant back, and the effect is even more dramatic if the person seeking employment is a person of color.¹ These challenges contribute to a 27% unemployment rate among formerly incarcerated individuals.²

Diversion programs have been established in 48 states and the District of Columbia³, and provide non-violent offenders a true second chance while avoiding the devastating consequences of conviction. At a time of growing national consensus on the importance of rehabilitation over incarceration, diversion programs play a vital role in changing our sometimes unjust criminal justice system.

¹ Wharton School of Public Policy, CRIMINAL RECORDS AND UNEMPLOYMENT: THE IMPACT ON THE ECONOMY, (August, 2017), <https://publicpolicy.wharton.upenn.edu/live/news/2071-criminal-records-and-unemployment-the-impact-on>

² Shannon, S.K.S., Uggen, C., Schnittker, J. et al. Demography (2017) 54: 1795. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13524-017-0611-1>

³ NCLS, Pretrial Diversion Programs, (Sept, 2017), <http://www.ncsl.org/research/civil-and-criminal-justice/pretrial-diversion.aspx>