



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

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**House Bill HB 97 - Criminal Procedure – Expungement of Records – Waiting Periods (REDEEM Act)
Judiciary Committee – January 31, 2023
SUPPORT**

Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony concerning an important priority of the **Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club** (WDC) for the 2023 legislative session. WDC is one of the largest and most active Democratic clubs in our county with hundreds of politically active members, including many elected officials. WDC is joining with the Job Opportunities Task Force and other criminal justice advocates to urge the passage of **HB0097**, a bill to reduce waiting periods for criminal record expungement in order to enhance the employability of, and reduce unemployment among, individuals who have experienced incarceration.

Every year thousands of Marylanders are released from state prisons and struggle to find jobs and a place to live in order to successfully reenter society. The stigma of a criminal record has been reported to be one of the most well-documented barriers to successful re-integration.¹ The appearance of a criminal record on a routine background check can, and many times will, block access to employment, education, housing, financial credit, and occupational licensing. WDC believes it is imperative that Maryland take steps to address the collateral consequences for Marylanders with criminal records, who are disproportionately Black and poor, by dealing with one of the obstacles to employment and successful reentry. Blocking access to employment after incarceration can have a devastating impact on families, particularly women and children already living in poverty.

Maryland has significantly longer waiting periods for expungement than most states.² For example, in the case of non-violent felonies, Maryland ranks 35th in the nation on expungement waiting periods, requiring a wait of 15 years after an individual has completed the sentence, parole or probation, drug treatment, and any mandatory supervision. Unreasonably long waiting periods have left individuals released from prison with insurmountable barriers to successful reentry. There are high rates of recidivism among returning citizens in Maryland, and the inability of returning citizens to find employment is one of the primary drivers.

The REDEEM Act simply shortens the waiting periods after the completion of an entire sentence, parole or probation, drug treatment, and any mandatory supervision—from 10 to 3 years for a group of misdemeanors and from 15 to 5 years for non-violent felonies. Passing the REDEEM Act will bring Maryland in line with a large and diverse group of states that have shortened waiting periods in recognition of the constructive role that record clearance plays in improving re-integration outcomes and the benefits to society and the community at large.

We ask for your support for HB0097 and strongly urge a favorable Committee report.

Diana E. Conway
WDC President

Holly Syrrakos
WDC Advocacy Committee

¹"A better path forward for criminal justice, A report by the Brookings-AEI Working Group on Criminal Justice Reform (April 2021), p. 75, <https://www.brookings.edu/multi-chapter-report/a-better-path-forward-for-criminal-justice/>

²Margaret Love & David Schluskel, "Waiting for Relief: A National Survey of Waiting Periods for Record Clearing," Collateral Consequences Res. Ctr. (February 2022), https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/cmte_testimony/2022/jpr/101gq0baEmE7g03Rc1gYAs-GLWSe7dSy.pdf