

Proposed Testimony of Lori James-Townes, Executive Director of the National Association of Public Defenders – SB602 Automated Expungement, Waiting Periods, and Adverse Actions (Clean Slate Act of 2024) – Wednesday, February 21, 2024, 1 pm before the Judicial Proceedings Committee

Honorable Chair, Vice-Chair, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

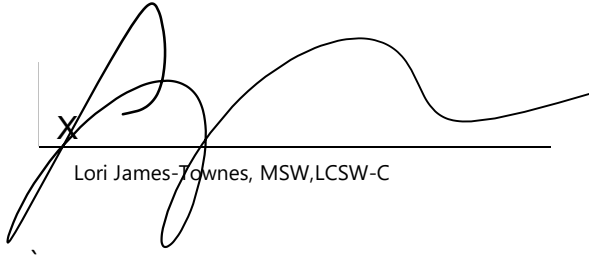
I am Lori James-Townes. I stand before you today as the Executive Director of the National Association for Public Defense. I have spent my entire professional career involved in criminal justice reform and/or public defense. This legislation represents a significant stride toward justice and redemption, underpinned by our shared belief in second chances and rehabilitation.

Senate Bill SB602 moves us closer to empowering returning citizens with the mechanism to petition for automated expungement of certain eligible offenses. Allow me to expound on the profound impact automated expungement could have:

1. Returning citizens are empowered through increased employment opportunities because their criminal record is often the biggest hurdle in securing gainful employment.
2. Rehabilitated citizens gain access to housing to create/enhance stability and growth for their families
3. An automatedly-expunged record widens the gates for those who seek self-improvement and economic mobility through higher education and training.
4. When certain offenses are wiped clean from a person's record, it dismantles barriers to community engagement, supports family unity, and fosters societal inclusion.

Senate Bill SB602 embodies the values of forgiveness, growth, and equity. It aligns closely with what we stand for at the National Association for Public Defense - ensuring a fair and just legal system for all, particularly for those willing to make amends and move forward constructively with their lives.

Members of the committee, I urge you to contemplate the long-term benefits that Senate Bill SB602 will usher in—not only for individuals seeking redemption but for society at large, which thrives when each of its members is accorded dignity and opportunity.



Lori James-Townes, MSW, LCSW-C