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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB985
**Compensation to Individual Erroneously Convicted, Sentenced, and Confined or
Whose Conviction or Adjudication Is Reversed**

TO: Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Atterbearly, and members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Samantha Blau

My name is Samantha Blau, I am a resident of Baltimore's Patterson Place neighborhood in District 46. I am also an avid listener of true crime podcasts and have spent a considerable amount of my free time listening to and considering how our justice system makes space for wrongful convictions, which is why I write this testimony in favor of HB985.

Many of us have heard of the "Central Park Five" and may have even watched Ava DuVernay's dramatization of the story, "When They See Us." The "Central Park Five" is one of the most famous examples of America's wrongful conviction cases, but it is certainly not singular. Those who pay close attention to the national news may have heard of the "Fairbanks Four" and the "Dixmoor Five," equally succinct titles for groups of children (now adults) who were wrongfully convicted of brutal crimes by an unjust justice system. Again, these cases are not unique, they are simply the twisted examples of a system of justice that allows children, people of color, and other marginalized individuals to be forced into false confessions and imprisoned for decades of their lives.

In Maryland we have our own recent case of national news making wrongful convictions. Alfred Chestnut (16 years old), Ransom Watkins (16 years old), and Andrew Stewart (17 years old) were juniors in highschool when they were framed by Baltimore City police for the murder of 14 year old DeWitt Duckett. Detective Donald Kincaid withheld evidence and failed to follow up on witness statements, instead making himself judge, jury, and all-but executioner for three innocent teenagers. The teens were sentenced to serve life in an adult prison facility where they were separated from family and friends, were unable to graduate from high school, to vote in their first election, go to college, date, get a job, start a family, were unable to participate in any number of milestones our society finds culturally significant when people become adults. Instead, three black teens were forced to give up 36 years of their lives at the altar of the Baltimore Police Department's "case closure" rate.

State's Attorney Mosby and her team recently looked at the case against Chestnut, Watkins, and Stewart thanks to Mr. Chestnut's efforts. The State's Attorney's office exonerated the three men within seven months of learning about the case. And now three men who lost their youth and half of their adult lives to a broken system are being asked to navigate that same system in order to receive any monetary compensation for the innumerable damages they have

endured. After everything that they and their families have endured, these men still need to pay a lawyer to pursue compensation for loss of time, skills, wages, and life experiences. That fact changes this story from disheartening to an absurdist nightmare.

I urge this committee to pass Wrongful Conviction Compensation (HB985) as a small measure to fix an enormous wrong.