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Prince George's County

ASSISTANT SPEAKER PRO TEM

Economic Matters Committee



The Maryland House of Delegates  
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**HB560**

Good Afternoon Chair Barve and my esteemed colleagues of this Committee, I'm Delegate Diana Fennell, of District 47A, Prince George's County, Maryland, the primary sponsor of – HB560 - “Re-entry Into Society Status” . This bill was originally introduced in the 2016 Session. There is still a clear and demonstrated need for the continuous effort to reform and improve the criminal justice system in America, Maryland in particular. We continue to hear about persons suffering the consequences of their mistake long after they have completed their sentencing due to their criminal record. If we, as legislators, are as serious as we say we are about second chances and reducing recidivism rates, then you each would consider supporting this bill.

A criminal record should not create a barrier to obtaining the basic needs of a human being, such as rental housing because as Obama has previously stated, it is “...one of the most fundamental building blocks of a stable life – a place to live.”

While there has been some dialogue about access to equal employment opportunities for reentering citizens, the conversation must still be taken a step further in the direction of not letting these efforts go in vain and produce a higher

likelihood for sustainability and productivity. Reducing discrimination towards reentering citizens can do this. This kind of human rights violation causes a great lifetime disservice to significant percentages of those who are homeless, youth from poor and now broken families and communities of color.

Many people fear the stigma that follows an ex-offender, but according to Seattle's FARE initiative (which is short for Fair Accessible Renting for Everyone), "There is no empirical evidence establishing a relationship between criminal record and an unsuccessful tenancy." How can we "predict" the probability a tenant is dangerous when even the criminal record itself isn't a reliable indicator for their future behavior?

I am an avid believer in second chances and redemption for those who have committed a mistake in life. They should not be ultimately judged by the weight of their old ways in the process of attempting to move on and create a more productive future.

Research indicates the overrepresentation of those with criminal records among our homeless population, which ultimately creates a greater fiscal strain on our state than producing supportive services and also poor families who are three times more likely to have at least one incarcerated parent. While we are open to suggestions on how to construct this legislation for its greater purpose, we do hope

HB 560  
DELEGATE DIANA FENNELL  
DISTRICT 47A, PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, MARYLAND

that you all will see this as the **next step** within the process of criminal justice system reform.

I urge a favorable report from this committee.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Diana M. Fennell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D'.

District 47A, Prince George's County, Maryland