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POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

BILL: SB 660

Criminal Procedure - Expungement of Records - Convictions

FROM: Maryland Office of the Public Defender

POSITION: Favorable

DATE: February 21, 2023

The Office of the Public Defender respectfully requests that the Committee issue a favorable report on House Bill 660.

The Public Defender's Office established a weekly expungement clinic in the NorthWest area of Baltimore and partnered with other organizations to offer an annual event - Back to the Neighborhood: How to Succeed with a Criminal Record." During this time, we came to learn the importance of the availability of expungement and how expungement can change lives.

Since 2007, there have been some major changes in the expungement law. Each year, the legislators have introduced changes to the expungement law and some have been signed into law. These laws have had an impact for so many Maryland residents and for many individuals in the years to come.

The Public Defender has advocated for change to allow our clients to move forward and not be burdened with the stigma of a criminal record years after the act - including not just what is on a person's RAP sheet but what is available on Maryland Judiciary Case Search and the information that has been obtained and disseminated by private databases. I like to refer to expungement as a form of legal redemption that should be accessible to all who have changed their lives and their stories for themselves and their families.

For some clients, the past remains in the past but for many clients it will resurface when they are looking for employment or advancement in their current jobs; looking for better housing opportunities; or looking to further their education. The change that these clients are hoping for may not be actualized because of these convictions remaining on their criminal record and Maryland Judiciary Case Search; and also that these dispositions remain in private databases. Clients who have rehabilitated themselves should be able to access the expungement statute.

For these reasons, the Maryland Office of the Public Defender urges this Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 660.

Submitted by: Government Relations Division of the Maryland Office of the Public Defender.

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