

NICOLE A. WILLIAMS, ESQ.
Legislative District 22
Prince George's County

DEPUTY MAJORITY WHIP

Judiciary Committee

Chair, Public Safety Subcommittee

Vice Chair, Prince George's
County House Delegation



Annapolis Office
The Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 207
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
301-858-3058 · 410-841-3058
800-492-7122 Ext. 3058
Nicole.Williams@house.state.md.us

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 1, 2023

The Honorable Delegate Luke Clippinger

Chair of the Judiciary Committee

6 Bladen Street, Room 101

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

House Bill 0041

Good afternoon, Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Moon, and members of the House Judiciary Committee. I am Delegate Nicole Williams of District 22, and I will be testifying today in favor of House Bill 0156, also known as Courts - Jury Service - Disqualification. This legislation extends the civil duty of participating in a jury to individuals with prior convictions that exceed a year. This would mean that regardless of your criminal charges, formerly incarcerated individuals will be able to participate in the Maryland legal system.

According to the Maryland Courts, our current jury service laws state that if an individual has been convicted of a crime punishable by more than 1 year in prison, they are disqualified to serve on a jury forever. If they were sentenced to more than 1 year in prison and have not been pardoned or have criminal charges pending for a crime that is punishable by more than 1 year in prison, that individual is also automatically disqualified from serving on a jury forever. Within these situations, the status of an individual's current criminal charges and criminal history does not and should not determine their ability to serve on a jury for the rest of their lives. Furthermore, an individual's experience with the legal system should not solely encompass the experiences that make up their criminal record. They should be able to practice their civil duties and, as a result, learn more about the judicial system.

In 2020, there were a total of 15,623 individuals incarcerated in Maryland. From that figure, Black individuals made up 11,120 of that population which is roughly 71% of Maryland's prison

population. This statistic, provided by the United States Department of Justice, demonstrates that Black individuals are more likely to get convicted at higher rates than any other demographic in Maryland. This means that Black people are disproportionately affected by the current jury service law more than any other group.

Passing House Bill 0156 ensures that the demographics of the jury reflect that of the society we live in. Allowing those who were previously incarcerated, the majority of whom are persons of color, increases jury diversity which is imperative for a bill that gives individuals with a criminal record an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of our judicial system. For these reasons, I urge this committee to give a favorable report on House Bill 0156.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nicole A. Williams, Esq." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Delegate Nicole A. Williams, Esq.