

March 5, 2024

Chairman Luke Clippinger  
Vice Chair Sandy Bartlett  
House Judiciary Committee  
House Office Building, Room 101  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**Re: Testimony Supporting House Bill 550- Criminal Procedure- Partial Expungement**

Dear Chairman Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and Members of the House Judiciary:

My name is Cynthia Horton, and I am the Chapter President of the Baltimore Metropolitan Alumnae Chapter, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. (BMAC). BMAC was chartered on March 1, 1987, by 36 women who sought to provide assistance to the residents of Baltimore City. Our mission is a direct reflection of the National Priorities set by Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. which is to “Foster our Commitment to Service and Sisterhood with Compassion.” One of the many ways that we serve the community is by hosting annual expungement clinics and resource fairs.

On February 3<sup>rd</sup> and February 8<sup>th</sup>, the Maryland Social Action Committee of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. (MSAC) held its annual Delta Day in Annapolis. During this conference, the Committee revealed public safety and criminal justice reform as one of its 2024 Legislative priorities. MSAC supports efforts to bring about police reform and to increase support for Marylanders who interact with the criminal justice system. On February 3<sup>rd</sup>, Delegate Nicole Williams informed us of her efforts to pass House Bill 550 which will allow a person to file a petition for partial expungement of an eligible conviction, even if another charge or conviction arising out of the same incident, transaction, or set of facts is not eligible for expungement. Otherwise known as the “unit rule”. To that end, the Baltimore Metropolitan Alumnae Chapter supports House Bill 550 because we believe this legislation will positively impact Marylanders who interact with the criminal justice system, by decreasing barriers erected after incarceration or conviction, and expanding opportunities to obtain housing, gainful employment, and healthcare access.

Since 2016, BMAC has partnered with the Gamma Omicron Omega Chapter of Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc., Maryland Legal Aid, Maryland Office of the Public Defender, and countless other organizations to deliver expungement assistance and resources providers such as housing, employment, mental health, and drug treatment to underserved communities. Together with our community partners, over 300 people have had expungement petitions filed on their behalf, and most complete a survey telling us how much an expungement will help them obtain employment and housing.

According to the Maryland Reentry Roundtable Report, each year, about 4,000 people are released from state prisons and return to communities across the state. In an article questioning the amount of money spent on incarceration, the Justice Policy Institute (JPI) and the Prison

Policy Initiative reported that one out of three Maryland residents in State prison is from Baltimore City. In addition, Baltimore has an incarceration rate three times that of the State of Maryland and the national average. It is without a doubt that the residents we serve would greatly benefit from this legislation. For example, data from the 2010 census revealed that there were 458 people in prison from the Sandtown-Winchester/Harlem Park community, located in West Baltimore, and there were only three people in prison from the Greater Roland Park/Poplar Hill community in North Baltimore. The Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services reported that for fiscal year 2022, Black or African American individuals made up 71% of Maryland's prison population.

Expanding access to criminal record expungement can open the door to a second chance at life, and lead to increased stabilization of underserved communities by providing more access to gainful employment, housing, healthcare access, and education. For example, many employers who offer healthcare benefits have more stringent hiring criteria. Expanding criminal record expungements, could lead to better employment opportunities and healthcare access. Therefore, gainful employment, is not only the building block to economic stability, but can foster healthier communities with greater access to healthcare.

We are confident that this legislation would greatly impact the communities we serve. Thank you for providing the Baltimore Metropolitan Alumnae Chapter with the opportunity to comment on this important piece of legislation.

We urge your support for the passage of HB550.

Sincerely,

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Cynthia Horton, Chapter President  
Baltimore Metropolitan Alumnae Chapter,  
Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.