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The Honorable Members of the House Judiciary Committee

Maryland General Assembly, Annapolis, MD 21401

## **Support Testimony for HB1423 – Commission to Review and Assess Racial Disparities in the State Criminal Justice System - Establishment**

Hearing Date: March 06, 2025

Chairperson and Esteemed Members of the Committee,

My name is Maureen Wambui, and I am a proud Immigrant, Parent, Community advocate and resident of Legislative District 8 in Maryland. I appreciate the opportunity to testify to and express my **strong support** for HB1423, which would establish a commission to review and assess racial disparities within our state's criminal justice system.

For too long, communities of color, particularly Black, Hispanic, and immigrant populations, have faced disproportionate policing, harsher sentencing, and systemic barriers to justice. HB1423 is an important step toward acknowledging these disparities, understanding their root causes, and developing policies that ensure fair treatment for all Maryland residents, regardless of race or background.

### **Why HB1423 is Necessary**

#### **1. Data-Driven Solutions to Racial Disparities**

- Studies have repeatedly shown that racial and ethnic minorities face higher arrest rates, longer sentences, and more severe penalties for similar offenses compared to White individuals.
- This commission will examine real data and identify policy solutions to address these inequalities, rather than relying on assumptions or incomplete narratives.

#### **2. Government Accountability & Actionable Recommendations**

- The establishment of this commission ensures that Maryland moves beyond conversations and takes measurable steps toward criminal justice reform.

- The requirement for a comprehensive report by September 2026 ensures transparency and accountability, giving lawmakers a clear roadmap for necessary reforms.

### **3. Impact on Immigrant & Minority Communities**

- Immigrants and minorities often lack legal representation, face language barriers, and are disproportionately targeted by certain enforcement policies.
- Many immigrants, particularly Black and Latino individuals, are at higher risk of deportation due to minor infractions that might not affect U.S. citizens in the same way.
- Understanding these disparities will help Maryland create policies that promote fairness, prevent racial profiling, and protect vulnerable communities.

### **4. Aligning Maryland with National Justice Reform Efforts**

- Across the country, states are taking proactive steps to address systemic racism in the justice system.
- By passing HB1423, Maryland can position itself as a leader in equitable justice reforms, ensuring that our policies reflect fairness, rehabilitation, and community safety.

### **Addressing Concerns About Bureaucracy**

Some may argue that we do not need another commission to study an issue that has already been widely reported. However, understanding disparities is only the first step, having a dedicated commission ensures that solutions are developed and implemented effectively. Without structured oversight, discussions about reform often stall without meaningful action.

HB1423 is not just about collecting data, it is about creating a Maryland where justice is truly equal for all. This bill lays the foundation for real, informed policy change that can improve public safety while ensuring fair treatment for communities of color. I urge the committee to vote in favor of HB1423 and take this important step toward a more just and equitable Maryland.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Wambui