

Written Testimony in support of Clean Slate HB.545/SB.398

March 4, 2025

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee,

As the CEO and Founder of Lilian's Southern Box Catering Company, I write to you in support of Clean Slate (HB.545/SB.398). By automating the record clearing process for eligible individuals, these bills would provide critical relief to over [400,000 Marylanders](#) with a record, many of whom are currently struggling to obtain stable employment, food security, housing, education, and more.

The necessity of such relief cannot be understated. [1 in every 4.6 adults in Maryland](#) have some form of a criminal record -- that means that 22% of our adult population is struggling to obtain meaningful employment. Studies have found that having a criminal record reduces the likelihood of a callback or job offer [by nearly 50 percent](#). Conversely, when people have their records cleared, their wages increase [by over 22% within one year](#). The solution is clear: automating our state's record clearing process would allow hundreds of thousands of Marylanders to return to work and to meaningfully contribute to their local communities and economies.

As a Maryland business owner and former public health professional, I've seen the impacts that having a criminal record can have firsthand. Throughout the entirety of my career to date, I've worked with vulnerable populations struggling with social determinants of health, employment, housing, and food insecurity. For many of the individuals I worked with, having a record — even a decades-old record — posed significant and nearly insurmountable challenges to them and their families. And while our state's current system does provide an expungement process, I heard time and time again that without the help of free expungement clinics with legal experts, it is almost impossible to navigate. In fact, studies estimate that on average, about [90% of eligible individuals](#) never go through the existing record clearing processes because of the costs, complexities and other barriers.

There's a reason why [84%](#) of small business owners support automated record clearing -- like me, these business owners understand that Clean Slate policies are good for our communities, businesses, and local economies. As Maryland continues to experience [severe labor shortages](#), local employers need to be able to access high quality talent to keep businesses running. In fact, [studies indicate](#) that second-chance hires have a lower turnover rate than other employees and their quality of work is on par, if not higher, than their peers.

It is also critical to note the racial disparities within criminal records in our state. 27% of Black adults have some form of a record, while Black people only represent 12.4% of the population. In comparison, 22% of white adults have a record while representing 48.3% of the total population. Studies show that the negative effect of a criminal conviction on employment is substantially larger for Blacks than for whites, [estimating that the magnitude of the criminal record penalty suffered by Black applicants \(60 percent\) is roughly double the size of the penalty for whites with a record \(30](#)

[percent](#)). Today, the Maryland legislature has a chance to uphold the values of equality and equity and help mitigate these dire disparities by passing Clean Slate.

Clean Slate policies also have a profound impact on women and their children, breaking cycles of economic hardship, reducing recidivism and creating pathways to stability. Studies show that [unemployment rates are higher for justice-impacted women than for justice-impacted men](#). Further, because women workers are concentrated in industries that perform more criminal background checks—retail and caregiving—formerly incarcerated women [may have still greater challenges in finding employment](#).

I have worked with justice-impacted women across child welfare, housing, employment, and behavioral health and have empowered such women to start their own businesses because of the challenges with obtaining employment. Even with my educational and professional background, there was a time when I faced similar hardships. This lived experience provided me a unique perspective to help these women navigate such challenges and further informs my support of Clean Slate. These policies provide increased access to business funding and resources, access to professional licensure, and opens opportunities for securing partnerships and contracts. By removing barriers associated with criminal records, these policies empower women to start and grow businesses, create jobs and build generational wealth in our state.

Instead of needlessly restricting hundreds of thousands of our neighbors from entering the labor market, we have the chance to create real opportunities for them to improve their lives, support their families, and strengthen our growing economy. They deserve a second chance, and it's up to us to give it to them. As a business leader and a Marylander, I applaud the sponsors of these bills for their efforts to make Maryland an even better place to live and work. I urge the Committee to pass Clean Slate.

Kenya Jenkins

CEO and Founder of Lilian's Southern Box Catering