

January 23, 2026
Mr. Nasyr Mathis-Chambers
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Please vote favorable for
THE PATH ACT

To the Honorable Senator Will Smith and the Vice President and Judicial Committee,

I am Nasyr Mathis-Chambers, a Public Policy and Political Science student at St. Mary's College of Maryland. I am writing in strong support of **SB0138 and HB0084 (the PATH Act)**. In addition to my studies, I serve as an intern with Helping Ourselves to Transform (HOTT) under the leadership of Dr. Carmen Johnson.

As Dr. Johnson's mentee for many years, I have seen firsthand how trauma, especially domestic violence, can create lifelong mental, emotional, and physical harm. Prior to her incarceration, Dr. Johnson experienced domestic abuse, including financial and psychological abuse by a former fiancé and business partner. Much of that abuse went unrecognized and unconsidered during her trial. Her trauma was further compounded by the way she was treated throughout the legal process and, later, while incarcerated, where she reports being subjected to verbal, physical, and psychological abuse by correctional staff. Although she is now home, those experiences have continued to impact her ability to fully heal and to experience a stable, supported reentry.

What is most astonishing to me is that Dr. Johnson continues to fight for others, especially women, despite having had so little support when she needed it most. Her story reflects a larger reality: our system is filled with people, particularly Black, Brown, and Indigenous individuals, who are survivors of abuse and trauma, yet their experiences are often dismissed, minimized, or excluded from meaningful consideration at sentencing. Too often, survivors are met with punishment instead of protection, and incarceration becomes a continuation of harm rather than a pathway toward rehabilitation.

Dr. Johnson is one of thousands, particularly Indigenous cisgender and transgender women, who have endured similar mistreatment. Many survivors never report abuse at all, or they remain silent out of fear, coercion, or to protect their abuser rather than themselves. And when survivors do speak up, Maryland's current legal framework too often prevents them from presenting evidence of prior abuse in a way that meaningfully informs sentencing. This exposes a serious gap in trauma-informed understanding and in the recognition of how domestic violence can shape a person's decisions, survival responses, and involvement in the legal system. The consequences are profound: a person's life, safety, and future can be determined without the court ever fully considering the harm they endured.

By passing **SB0138 and HB0084**, Maryland has a real opportunity to improve outcomes for survivors and strengthen the fairness of our justice system. The PATH Act would help ensure survivors receive more informed,

trauma-responsive consideration at sentencing, and that they have access to the services, programs, and protections they may need when they appear before a judge. Dr. Johnson's story has helped motivate HOTT to be part of the change Maryland needs, and the PATH Act is a critical step toward a more just and equitable state.

I would also like to personally thank Senator Shaneka Henson and Delegate Stephanie Smith for serving as champions of this very important legislation.

I respectfully urge a **favorable report and vote** on **SB0138 and HB0084**.

Sincerely,

Nasyr Mathis-Chambers