



OUT FOR JUSTICE

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 169:

Good Cause Expungements

March 3rd, 2026

TO: House Judiciary Committee
FROM: Sekwan Merritt

Dear Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Sekwan Merritt. I am a member of Out for Justice, a former student in the Goucher Prison Education Partnership, and the founder of Lightning Electric in Baltimore. I am writing in support of House Bill 169, Good Cause Expungements. This bill allows courts to grant expungement upon a showing of good cause after a defined waiting period, ensuring that rehabilitation and present day impact are fully considered.

In 2012, I was convicted on a drug charge involving 2.3 grams of heroin. I served five years and was released in 2017. While incarcerated, I invested in my education, studied business and electrical work, and completed 40 college credits through the Goucher Prison Education Partnership. I came home focused on building something that would create opportunity, not just for me, but for others who had been written off.

I founded Lightning Electric as a small business that provides commercial electrical services and intentionally hires system impacted people, offering a real pathway to stable employment. We have completed major commercial projects, including work for national companies and public entities. But even as we grew, my record continued to shape access to opportunity.

During the pandemic, my application for the Paycheck Protection Program was denied because of my criminal record. I became a lead plaintiff in litigation filed by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the Public Interest Law Center, and Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs, which successfully challenged the federal rule excluding formerly incarcerated business owners from CARES Act funding. That victory changed policy nationwide, but it should not require a federal lawsuit for someone to access basic economic relief.

The reality is that collateral consequences do not disappear when a sentence ends. They follow you into licensing decisions, bonding requirements, lending determinations, and federal contracting. House Bill 169 permits a person to petition for expungement five years after a misdemeanor and seven years after a felony, requires a hearing, and authorizes relief upon a showing of good cause.

Judges must consider rehabilitation, public safety, time passed, and the impact of the conviction on employment and economic stability. This framework recognizes growth without compromising



accountability. I built a company that creates second chances and fuels economic mobility in Baltimore. I've worked to change federal policy so others would not face the same barriers I did. Good Cause Expungements would give people like me the opportunity to ask a court to formally recognize that change and remove obstacles that no longer serve public safety.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on House Bill 169. Thank you for your consideration.