



February 27, 2026

PLEASE VOTE FAVORABLE

Re: SUPPORT for House Bill 169 – Criminal Procedure – Expungement of Records – Good Cause

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

Helping Ourselves to Transform (HOTT) respectfully submits this letter in strong support of House Bill 169, which authorizes courts to grant expungement of misdemeanor convictions after five years and felony convictions after seven years upon a showing of good cause.

HOTT is a Maryland-based, women-led social justice research and direct-service organization serving justice-impacted individuals, returning citizens, and at-risk youth. Through our court observation initiatives, reentry programming, and legislative advocacy, we have witnessed firsthand how permanent criminal records create long-term barriers to economic stability, housing, education, and employment, often long after individuals have completed their sentences and demonstrated rehabilitation.

House Bill 169 provides a thoughtful, balanced pathway forward. It does not create automatic expungement. Instead, it establishes a structured judicial review process, allowing courts to evaluate petitions based on clear statutory criteria, including:

- The nature of the offense
- The individual's history and character
- Risk to public safety
- Demonstrated rehabilitation
- Time elapsed since conviction
- The ongoing impact of the conviction on employment, housing, licensing, and economic opportunity

This approach preserves judicial discretion while recognizing that individuals who have successfully completed their sentence, parole, probation, and mandatory treatment should have a meaningful opportunity to move forward.

HB 169 directly addresses the reality that a permanent record can function as a lifelong civil barrier, restricting access to employment, safe housing, educational advancement, professional licensing, and long-term economic stability. By allowing courts to weigh whether continued public access to a record serves justice, or whether expungement better supports reintegration and community stability, the bill strengthens both fairness and accountability.

Research consistently shows that stable employment and housing are among the strongest predictors of reduced recidivism. By creating a structured “good cause” standard for expungement, Maryland would strengthen public safety while expanding economic opportunity.

Importantly, the bill includes guardrails: denial is not appealable, and subsequent petitions are limited to once every three years. These provisions maintain judicial efficiency and prevent misuse while still allowing individuals a future opportunity to demonstrate growth.

HOTT believes that accountability and second chances are not mutually exclusive. HB 169 affirms that people are more than their worst mistake and that rehabilitation, when demonstrated, should have tangible legal recognition.

For these reasons, Helping Ourselves to Transform respectfully urges a favorable report on House Bill 169.

Thank you for your consideration and continued leadership.

Respectfully,

Sincerely,

Dr. Carmen R. Johnson /s/

Executive Director

202-674-6300

Helping Ourselves to Transform (HOTT)

<https://helpingourselves.org/>