

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 169

TO: Hon. Sandy Bartlett, Chair, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Zachary Alberts, Director of Advocacy at the Center for Urban Families

DATE: February 27, 2026

Chair Smith and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Zach Alberts and I am the Director of Advocacy at the Center for Urban Families. I'm here representing communities most impacted by the limited scope of Maryland's expungement laws and to urge support for good cause expungement.

In Maryland today, there are over 1,000 different charges a person can be convicted of, yet only about 120 of these are eligible for expungement. Many of these ineligible convictions range from such minor offenses as selling a sparkler to someone under the age of 16 to underage drinking. This leaves countless Marylanders permanently branded by their past mistakes without any pathway to a clear record.

Every session that this committee hears testimony on bills that would add specific charges to the expungement statute, inevitably, those hearings inevitably feature impacted individuals asking you to add their particular charge to the statute. This is because our piecemeal approach to expungement fails to wholly address the fundamental purpose of our expungement laws.

This can also be seen in the distinction between distribution and possession with intent to distribute, which reveals the arbitrary distinctions between charges that are expungable and those that are not. Many of these charges stem directly from the failed war on drugs, with "hand-to-hand" transactions resulting in different charges based on circumstance, not actual culpability

Finally, opponents of this legislation often bring up objections such as "would you expunge a conviction for murder?" Anyone who lives or works in communities most impacted by mass incarceration and centuries of structural racism, sexism, and classism knows a profound truth: some of the best people you'll ever meet are individuals who did something really bad 45 years ago when they were young, and have since transformed themselves into pillars of the community. We should trust the judges who levy the sentences with the power to recognize and reward individuals' rehabilitation and transformation.

We urge a favorable report for HB 169.