

Testimony of Dr. Lori James, Executive Director of the National Association of Public Defense and Representing Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

**In support of:** [HB360 - Criminal Procedure - Automated Expungement \(Clean Slate Act of 2026\)](#)

Oral testimony **Hearing Date: Tuesday, March 4, Judiciary Committee – 1pm**

Honorable Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the Judiciary Committee,

I am Lori James. I stand before you today in support of HB360 as the Executive Director of the National Association for Public Defense, an organization of 30K members; including the Maryland Office of Public Defenders. I am also a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., an international organization with more than 1,000 chapters. Twenty-five chapters are in the State of Maryland, representing every county.

I have spent my entire professional career involved in criminal justice reform and/or public defense. This legislation represents a significant stride toward justice and redemption, underpinned by our shared belief in second chances and rehabilitation.

House Bill HB360 moves us closer to empowering returning citizens with the mechanism to petition for expungement of certain eligible offenses. Allow me to expound on the profound impact automated expungement could have:

1. System impacted citizens are empowered through increased employment opportunities because their criminal record is often the biggest hurdle in securing gainful employment.
2. Rehabilitated citizens gain access to housing to create/enhance stability and growth for their families
3. An automated expunged record widens the gates for those who seek self-

improvement and economic mobility through higher education and training.

4. When certain offenses are wiped clean from a person's record, it dismantles barriers to community engagement, supports family unity, and fosters societal inclusion.

HB360 embodies the values of forgiveness, growth, and equity. It aligns closely with what we stand for at the National Association for Public Defense - ensuring a fair and just legal system for all, particularly for those willing to make amends and move forward constructively with their lives.

Members of the committee, on behalf of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. and the National Association for Public Defense, I urge you to contemplate the long-term benefits that HB360 will usher in—not only for individuals seeking redemption but for society at large, which thrives when each of its members is accorded dignity and opportunity. Please issue a favorable report in support of HB360.