

Testimony of Monica Watkins, Past President, Baltimore Alumnae Chapter, Member of Inaugural Eastern Region Delta PEARL Program, established BRIDGE (Bringing Resources and Information Designed to Grow and Empower Project in BAC Chapter.

Representing Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

In support of [HB360/SB483 - Automated Expungement \(Clean Slate Act of 2026\)](#)

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

I am Monica Watkins, Past President, Baltimore Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., and I established the BRIDGE Project (Bringing Resources and Information Designed to Grow and Empower Project in Baltimore Alumnae Chapter.

I support HB360 as a step towards truly giving returning citizens the opportunity to be successful upon re-entering the community.

The BRIDGE Project aligns with our Grand Chapter's initiative to Empower Women and Girls. Several years ago, I was competitively selected to work on a 10-month program with other members of my sorority from around the country. This research-based leadership program focused on shaping our sorority's initiatives for impactful change. We chose to support justice-impacted women, providing resources, advocacy, information and empowerment. While our focus is on women of color, our strategic alliances and initiatives yield positive outcomes for all. Justice impacted Marylanders and those in our program have expressly identified the inability to secure employment due to the excruciatingly long, and complicated process to have their records erased after they have paid their debt to society. The inability to support their families is particularly harsh in the Black community. The Maryland General Assembly's Department of Legislative Services has prepared racial equity impact notes for other expungements bills this year and in years' pass. Here is one of DLS's critical data points:

[The Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services](#) reports that, as of January 2026, “Black individuals made up 71% of Maryland’s prison population contrasted with their 30% share of the State’s overall population. It is therefore a reasonable assumption that Black individuals comprise a meaningful portion of the population seeking to expunge criminal records.” These statements are the exact same racial equity impact statements made in expungement legislation in 2024 for fiscal year 2023.

I also quote from a November 2023 Forbes.com article stating that “Data consistently demonstrates that racial minorities experience disproportionate levels of adversity in the areas of life affected by a criminal record. They go on to state “70 to 100 million Americans carry some kind of misdemeanor or felony record, and due to the racial and ethnic biases in our justice system, criminal records disproportionately impact BIPOC communities. Criminal records create numerous barriers, fueling and reinforcing cycles of poverty, and even old and minor records can make it difficult for someone to rent an apartment, get a job, and rebuild their life.”

Members of the committee, the women we mentor in Baltimore City and Baltimore County, are facing insurmountable odds. Members of my chapter and other chapters around the state are here to also demonstrate support for this bill. I urge your favorable report on HB360 to give justice impacted citizens of our State the opportunity at a better life that will result in an enhanced quality of life for us all.