



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

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**House Bill 0122 – Criminal Procedure – Expungement of Records – Expansion
House Judiciary Committee – Feb. 1, 2022 at 1pm
SUPPORT**

Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony concerning an important priority of the **Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club (WDC)** for the 2022 legislative session. WDC is one of Maryland's largest and most active Democratic Clubs with hundreds of politically active women and men, including many elected officials.

WDC urges the passage of **HB0122**. This bill will expand the scope of automatic expungements of certain police and court records to include cases resolved through "probation before judgment" and "stet" if all court-ordered provisions have been satisfied.

Expunging records of low-level offenses helps people charged with low-level crimes and will help affected people qualify for housing, loans, government assistance and jobs. People whose cases are resolved through "probation before judgment" and "stet" are not convicted of crimes. Having a police record generally makes life harder for them and for the families who depend upon them.

In the name of justice, we must clear people of unimportant criminal records. Maryland has for too long penalized people for being poor, creating *de facto* debtors' prisons, and trapping many in a vicious cycle where the smallest interaction with the criminal justice system becomes a life sentence. According to the National Women's Law Center, 9.4% of women in Maryland live in poverty, with 24.3% of female-headed households in Maryland living below the poverty line. We must remove unjust barriers for men and women that prevent them from supporting their families and perpetuate the cycle of poverty in over-policed and over-incarcerated communities.

These policies and practices also disproportionately affect people of color and their communities. According to a 2019 report from The Sentencing Project, Maryland's Black population accounts for 30%, but they account for 70+% of state prisoners. Latinos account for 4% of the population, and 10% of the prison population. There is every reason to believe that the same kind of bias exists in charging low-level offenses.

Automatically removing obstacles to living one's life is a critical piece of building a just and equitable society.

We ask for your support for HB0122 and strongly urge a favorable Committee report.

Respectfully,

Leslie Milano
President