

HB2028.Stacey Knoell.1_25_2023.Pro

My name is Stacey Knoell, and I am the Executive Director of the Kansas African American Affairs Commission. Today, we are lending our support to HB2028 which would allow for the automatic expungement of certain criminal records.

Having a criminal record is a stumbling block at best and a barrier at worst for many people who seek to live their lives to their fullest potential. Not everyone has the resources or background knowledge to pursue a manual expungement of their records. That is why the most encouraging aspect of the bill we have before us today is that for many, the expungement process would be automated. This is a chance for the system to take care of those impacted rather than placing the burden on the individuals. Automatic expungement then frees those individuals to receive housing, employment, or loans without fear of their past being a hindrance to their future.

There is a strong economic argument to make concerning expungement. A clean criminal record allows people to enter the workforce and earn a higher income which gives them more spending power. Economic arguments aside, expungement of low-level crimes where the person has shown little evidence of being a repeat offender is the right thing to do. We could ask how this will impact the economy, but a better question is how this will impact the quality of life for Kansans. Are we treating this segment of the population with dignity and how we would like to be treated in return?

One provision to consider as the discussion moves forward is how fees continue to show up in the expungement process. Not all crimes are candidates for expungement, nor should they be. However, when expungement is not automatic, placing a burden of additional fines and fees, from \$10 - \$176 on the cleared person may mean that some people who deserve to have their records wiped will not do so because they cannot afford it. Such fines and fees seem to say that freedom in America only comes to those with monetary means. We would encourage the reduction or removal of such fines and fees from the process of clearing the name of a person who deserves a clean slate.

Given the history of how bills like this have stalled at various stages, we encourage the committee to work on this bill and move it to a vote on the floor. This is the legislative session to show that Kansas is a place where one can truly start over and improve their life no matter their background.