

*For Immediate Release*

## **BURLINGTON COUNTY BAR, PARTNERS MOUNT DAY OF SERVICE**

*Mt. Holly, N.J., Oct. 25* — The Burlington County Bar Association will be conducting its seventh annual day of service on Friday, Oct. 29, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., at two locations, Tabernacle Baptist Church, 150 E. Second St., Burlington City, and Friendship A.M.E. Church, 711 Lakehurst Rd., Browns Mills.

This year's event, which involves more than 20 volunteer attorneys, will focus on initiating criminal expungements for eligible residents.

"Research has shown that expungements are a win-win," said Stephen Hunter, drug court director for the state Office of the Public Defender and one of the bar members spearheading the clinic. "People who receive expungements are less likely to commit new crimes, and their wages increase, on average, by 25 percent."

Hunter noted that many people, although eligible, do not apply for expungements because they cannot afford to hire attorneys to file the applications. "I am excited that the public defender's office has partnered with the bar association, the Burlington County Prosecutor's Office and others to make this free expungement clinic a reality," he said. "By working together, we plan to assist hundreds of individuals with filing their expungements. We hope that our clinic will serve as a model for future clinics throughout the state and nation."

Burlington County Prosecutor Scott Coffina shared Hunter's enthusiasm. "We are excited to be a part of this clinic," he said. "Those who are entitled to expungement of their criminal records should get them as soon as possible, so they can get the benefits of a clean slate, including expanded opportunities for jobs, education and housing."

Those interested in pursuing an expungement should report to one of the two locations on Oct. 29. They will be paired with an attorney, who will determine whether they are statutorily eligible. If they are, the attorney will initiate the process by filing a petition on the state judiciary's electronic platform.

Once a petition is filed, it is reviewed by the county prosecutor and the court. If the expungement is granted, courts and law enforcement agencies throughout the state are served with an order directing them to remove the person's criminal history from their records.

"For many people, an expungement can be a life-altering event," said Kevin Walker, a public defender and former bar president who initiated the day of service in 2015. "It allows them to turn the page, to move on with their lives, unencumbered by a criminal conviction."

The Burlington County Bar Association, working with Pastor Cory Jones of the Tabernacle Baptist Church and Rev. Samuel Hayes and his wife, Donna Hayes, of Friendship A.M.E. Church, has been planning this event since last spring.

"Our communities are filled with people forced to suffer the perpetual repercussions of actions committed in their youth or mistakes made in their adult lives," said Rev. Jones. "Expungements provide forgiveness, grace and a second chance to those who just want the opportunity to excel in life. As a church that believes in God's grace," he added, "how could we not support this cause?"

Rev. Hayes echoed the sentiment. "In the search to fulfill our humanistic purpose, we must embrace activism that speaks with power to the people 'for such a time as this'" he said. "We applaud the leadership in the Burlington County justice system as they endeavor to labor in the fields of forgiveness and grace, exalting the downtrodden in society."

Carolyn V. Chang, past president of the Association of Black Women Lawyers of New Jersey and co-chair of the state bar's Commission on Racial Equity in the Law, has been instrumental in mustering the necessary resources. With her assistance, the bar association has been able to enlist the help or sponsorship of the Burlington City police, The Links, Inc. (Rancocas Valley chapter), Tracey Syphax of the Block to the Boardroom, Inc., the Garden State Bar Association, Trulieve and Phax Group Construction & Design, LLC.

"I am thrilled that we have all come together in an effort to duplicate the success of the expungement program conducted by the Association of Black Women Lawyers of New Jersey in Mercer County in the fall of 2019," said Chang. "Special thanks to all of the sponsors and partners who support the concept of a second chance."

*For additional information, please contact:*

Robyn Goldenberg  
Executive Director, BCBA  
[rgoldenberg@burlcobar.org](mailto:rgoldenberg@burlcobar.org)  
609-261-4542