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**Statement from New Yorkers United for Justice Chief Strategist
Khalil A. Cumberbatch and Senior Advisor Topeka K. Sam**

NEW YORK – New Yorkers United for Justice (NYUJ) Chief Strategist Khalil A. Cumberbatch and Senior Advisor Topeka K. Sam released the following statement today applauding the inclusion of expungement for marijuana-related offenses in a decriminalization bill passed by the New York State Legislature.

“For too long our state’s criminal justice system has erected barriers to second chances that have undermined public safety and disproportionately harmed lower-income New Yorkers and families of color. With the passage of marijuana decriminalization including expungement provisions, New York is taking an important first step toward providing a second chance, yet we know much more is left to do.

“As formerly incarcerated New Yorkers, we know better than most the destructive impact of a past conviction. The expungement of certain marijuana-related records – reforms endorsed by NYUJ – means long-overdue clean slates for thousands of New Yorkers, ensuring greater access to stable housing, livable wages, and educational opportunities.

“New York has joined a growing number of states that include automatic expungement in their criminal code. While these initial provisions are limited in their scope, they set an important precedent. Now we must ensure that this reform marks the beginning of a long-overdue conversation to remove the stain of certain criminal records that limit hope and opportunity for individuals rebuilding their lives, contribute to higher rates of recidivism and make us all less safe.

“Combined with the significant pretrial reforms achieved earlier in this session, it’s clear that the Legislature and Governor are serious about criminal justice reform and have given careful thought to reforms that promote safety and fairness in New York. Decriminalization and expungement represent an important stride towards creating an equitable and safe system.

“These are meaningful steps that New Yorkers in every city, town, and rural community across the state can feel confident in. We are proud of the progress so far, and

stand committed to continuing a statewide conversation around comprehensive reforms, including parole, that will focus on **reducing recidivism, encourage rehabilitation, and make our communities safer.**"

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