
Kimberly Haven

March 10, 2020

Chairwoman Pendergrass
Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk
Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee

HB 1566 – Maryland Correctional Enterprises - Workgroup on
Vocational Training and Placement

Position: SUPPORT

My name is Kimberly Haven and I am in support of HB 1566.

As one of the leading criminal justice advocates in our State, I urge this committee to support this legislation.

Additionally, as someone who has the lived experiences of incarceration and was employed by Maryland Correctional Enterprises during my incarceration, I can speak to both the issues with and the need for this legislation.

During my incarceration women were only required to work 1 day a month – this was due to the fact that there was not enough business brought in to support more days than that. As a result, women were denied opportunities to learn a skill that would help make them more employable upon their release. When women were hired, they were told that MCE would be a good employer upon their release and because they were already working with them, there was a program called MCE Cares that was created to assist them.

During my entire time with MCE, I never once saw MCE Cares on-site nor was I aware of any attempt on their part to reach in and begin the post-incarceration employment program.

Finally, as one of the leading advocates, I have worked with several women who attempted to get a job with MCE. They were both long-time employees of MCE while inside – yet upon their release, they found the process not user friendly, laborious and difficult to navigate and was fraught with delay after delay. One woman was in the pipeline for over 7 months, consistently told that they were working on her paperwork

and a variety of other delays. What finally happened was that she ended up having to find alternate employment as she could not continue to wait on this process. She had a family to support as well as meet a requirement of her parole.

The other woman was in a transitional program, and she too was subjected to the absurdly lengthy process. Fortunately, she was in a program that understood she was working with them and was able to wait it out. She ultimately was hired by MCE.

What is glaringly obvious, is that MCE, perhaps more so than any other prison program, should be the leader in post-incarceration employment. There are clearly not enough opportunities within MCE as an employer and there are not enough partnerships with the business communities. This is evident by the lack of contracts that provide work inside the institutions as well.

This is not an issue of their not having enough revenue to support expansion of their efforts – they have a lock on state contracts for their services and products and they charge market rate (while paying incarcerated individuals between 90cents a day to perhaps as much as \$2/day).

HB 1566 will convene a workgroup that will study all of these issues and make sound recommendations to MCE that will shine a bright light on the practices of MCE and develop a way to improve its functionality. It will bring in a group of stakeholders to address one of the greatest barriers to reentry that people returning to our community face – the ability to find employment.

MCE has the potential to work better, be a better stakeholder in the State, and function in a more fiscally responsible and responsive manner. The workgroup proposed by this legislation will help ensure this.

For these reasons and others, I urge a favorable report on HB 1566.

Respectfully,
Kimberly Haven