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PARLIAMENTARIAN

Ways and Means Committee



The Maryland House of Delegates
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 10, 2020

House Bill 1566 Maryland Correctional Enterprises – Workgroup on Vocational Training and Placement

Dear Colleagues,

I am pleased to present **House Bill 1566 Maryland Correctional Enterprises – Workgroup on Vocational Training and Placement**, which would require the Commissioner of Correction and the Chief Executive Officer of Maryland Correctional Enterprises (MCE) to establish and convene a vocational training and placement workgroup with the goal of improving the rate of job placement for program participants in meaningful, sustainable employment post-incarceration.

Maryland Correctional Enterprises is a program of the prison system that employs incarcerated individuals to produce products used by municipal, county, state, and federal institutions and agencies. A major component of the mission of MCE is to provide structured employment and training activities for incarcerated workers in order to improve employability upon release. This mission is critical to our state and to public safety because we know that incarcerated people who gain real-world training and skills are more likely to obtain gainful employment after release, and are less likely to recidivate.

Despite the importance of MCE's mission, metrics and progress in the area of gainful employment for participants of the program are unclear. MCE advertises over \$55 million in sales through low wage labor, with participants - a majority of them Black and Brown, making as low as \$0.17/hour. HB 1566 requires MCE to bring together industry experts and stakeholders to assess its program and identify additional opportunities to improve the program to ensure program participants are gaining the educational and technical skills they need to gain employment in current and future industries in the state.

In order to maximize MCE's public safety mission, we must ensure the programs are effective and utilizing evidence-based training and employment practices to ensure eligible workers are placed in industry positions and gainful employment post-incarceration. For these reasons, I urge the committee to give a **favorable** report for **House Bill 1566**.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jheanelle Wilkins".

Delegate Jheanelle Wilkins