



POSITION STATEMENT

TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL 355 -- STATE COMMISSION ON CRIMINAL SENTENCING POLICY - ANNUAL REPORT - CRIMES OF VIOLENCE

February 4, 2020

**DONALD C. FRY
PRESIDENT & CEO
GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE**

Position: Support

House Bill 355 requires additional information be included in the annual report submitted by the State Commission on Criminal Sentencing Policy, which reviews sentencing policy and practices. Specifically, the bill requires that the following information be identified for each conviction of a crime of violence: (1) the crime of which the defendant was convicted; (2) the sentence imposed; (3) the applicable sentencing guidelines range; (4) the disposition of the case as indicated on the sentencing guidelines worksheet; (5) for convictions in which a portion of the sentence is suspended, the amount of time suspended and the percentage of the sentence suspended; (6) for sentencing events that resulted in a departure from sentencing guidelines the departure cited; (7) the court and judicial circuit with jurisdiction over the case; and (8) the sentencing judge.

The Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) has studied the issue of judicial data availability and concluded that Maryland's judiciary fails to provide the transparency needed for the public to make proper assessments of judges and sentencing. When examining currently available data, the GBC determined that compared to some other states, there is significant lack of ability to collect comparative empirical data. Thanks to a growing capacity of information technologies and the development of electronic management systems, the public should be able to easily access data that can be used to assess the efficiency and efficacy of Maryland's courts.

It is the contention of the GBC that using statistical data can promote transparency and judicial accountability. The current difficulty in gathering and measuring data hinders the ability to identify problems or to measure the consistency of courts and judges. This need is particularly acute in Baltimore City where access to data has the potential to improve outcomes related to the reduction of violent crime.

To improve judicial accountability, the GBC asserts that more information should be provided in a transparent manner. House Bill 355 is a strong step forward by ensuring that the public will have greater access into how the judiciary is addressing the challenge of repeat violent offenders. This bill simply applies best practices for transparency and accountability that already exists in the executive and legislative branches of Maryland's government and places the State on par with judicial systems in other states.

Additionally, the GBC's *2020 Legislative Priorities* affirm that Maryland should "improve public safety through enhanced coordination among criminal justice agencies and implementation of comprehensive violence reduction strategies" and can accomplish this through "improve(ed) public accessibility of judicial data to increase transparency." House Bill 355 is an important step in regard to addressing some of the State's most pressing public safety issues.

For these reasons, the Greater Baltimore Committee urges a favorable report on House Bill 355.

The Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) is a non-partisan, independent, regional business advocacy organization comprised of hundreds of businesses -- large, medium and small -- educational institutions, nonprofit organizations and foundations located in Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Harford, and Howard counties as well as Baltimore City. The GBC is a 65-year-old, private-sector membership organization with a rich legacy of working with government to find solutions to problems that negatively affect our competitiveness and viability.

GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE

111 South Calvert Street • Suite 1700 • Baltimore, Maryland • 21202-6180

(410) 727-2820 • www.gbc.org