



TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION OF HB 658

Local Correctional Facilities - Requirement for Prerelease Program

Judiciary Committee

February 18 2020

Submitted by Stacey Jefferson and Margo Quinlan, Co-Chairs

Member Agencies:

Advocates for Children and Youth
Baltimore Jewish Council
Behavioral Health System Baltimore
CASH Campaign of Maryland
Catholic Charities
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Maryland Community Action
Partnership
Maryland Family Network
Maryland Hunger Solutions
Paul's Place
Public Justice Center
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Marylanders Against Poverty

Stacey Jefferson, Chair
P: 410-637-1900 ext 8578
C: 443-813-9231

E: stacey.jefferson@bhsbaltimore.org

Margo Quinlan, Co-Chair
C: 410-236-5488

E: mquinlan@familyleague.org

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) opposes House Bill 658 to ensure that the underemployed pre-release defendants are not pushed further into debt and penalized as a result of pre-release costs. House Bill 658 seeks to require the governing body of each county that receives State funding for public safety to establish a prerelease program for individuals confined in the jurisdiction's local correction facilities. From the inmate's earnings, the director may deduct the cost to the county for food, lodging, and clothing for the inmate. The assessment of fees onto those who interact with the criminal justice system creates an unbreakable cycle that cannot be fixed by waivers or payment plans. An inability to pay is simply that, regardless of the amount or time given to pay it. Studies show that criminal justice debt can loom over individuals for a lifetime, with formerly incarcerated men paying 35 to 60 percent of their income to criminal justice related fees and debt. Even further, the charging of fees for critical correctional programming like prerelease and work release gives incarcerated individuals no choice – incur the debt or lack the necessary skills to improve themselves upon release, especially for those who are not convicted.

Individuals who can't afford to pay for their freedom often face serious consequences, including incarceration, extended probation, or denial of treatment—they are unfairly penalized for being poor and pulled deeper into the justice system. For the 10 percent of Marylanders living below the federal poverty line, the management and repayment of even small debts can be a major challenge. This challenge is further exacerbated for those with a criminal record, a significant barrier to employment. However, despite these known obstacles, the re-entering community are levied with fees and other criminal justice system debt upon release. This is debt that they simply cannot repay and presents yet another obstacle for them to hurdle.

MAP seeks to oppose any legislation that push the most vulnerable population further into the criminal justice system simply due to the lack of financial means.

MAP appreciates your consideration, and urges an unfavorable report on House Bill 658.

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.

