
Kimberly Haven

February 24, 2020

Chairman Clippinger
Vice Chair Atterbeary
Members of the House Judiciary Committee

HB 979- Inmate Cost of Living Report
Maryland Correctional Enterprise Diversity
Position: SUPPORT

My name is Kimberly Haven and I am in support of HB 979.

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

This legislation will expand the annual report that DPSCS already issues. It will shine a bright light on the operation of several areas that advocates have been concerned about - areas that have long gone unreported on.

Maryland Correctional Enterprises is the employer "behind the walls" in our prisons. However, there are a myriad of problems. This report will require that the report include information on the availability of jobs, the daily wage and the number of currently employed individuals.

Problematic to MCE, particularly for the women at MCI-W, is that there is not enough work to keep them working on a regular basis. As a result, the wait lists to get into the MCE shops is exceptionally long, and unless they have a desired skill, there is not enough work or opportunity. Because of this, those inmates who rely on their wages at MCE remain unable to provide for the basic necessities that they need (shampoo, stamps, laundry detergent, phone calls, to name a few)

And yet, MCE has a contract that allows them to sell their products at market price. They are in essence getting rich on the backs of inmate labor!

This legislation also requires that DPSCS report out on commissary costs. This has been a point of contention for many years. Commissary items are priced at market (and in some instances more than market) price. For inmates who are not able to earn a wage while incarcerated, this puts necessary items out of their reach. Again, a vendor is making money at the expense of the inmate population.

Between MCE and the commissary inclusion in the annual DPSCS report, a clear picture of the exploitation of the inmate population and the cost that inmates and their families must bear just to survive while vendors make a profit.

This legislation is good policy and therefore I urge a favorable report on HB 979.

Respectfully,
Kimberly Haven