

JOTF JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION OF HOUSE BILL 979:
**Correctional Services – Inmate Cost-of-Living Report – Maryland Correctional
Enterprises Diversity Report**

TO: Hon. Chairman Luke Clippinger, and Members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Christopher Dews, Policy Advocate

DATE: February 25, 2020

The Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) is an independent, nonprofit organization that develops and advocates policies and programs to increase the skills, job opportunities, and incomes of low-skill, low-wage workers and job seekers in Maryland. We support House Bill 979 as a means of adding transparency to the pay scale of employment opportunities to incarcerated citizens.

As of 2019, the United States of America currently holds roughly 22% of the world's prison population. Year after year, the United States beats out much larger countries -- India, China -- and more totalitarian ones --Russia and the Philippines -- for the distinction of having the highest incarceration rate in the world.

According to a 2018 report from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), nearly 2.2 million adults were held in America's prisons and jails at the end of 2016. That means for every 100,000 people residing in the United States, approximately 655 of them were behind bars. Approximately \$80 billion is still spent each year on corrections facilities alone, according to a Prison Policy Initiative report, dwarfing 2018's \$68 billion discretionary budget of the Department of Education.

Though African-Americans comprise only about 12% of the total US population, they represent 33 percent of the federal and state prison population. In the state of Maryland, the percentage increases to 70% meaning that any legislation influencing the prison population will disproportionately affect African Americans. It is vital then, that as much data as can be gathered on the lifestyles of the incarcerated population be accessible to the state and made transparent to the people.

The proposed legislation would add to the annual corrections report specific data surrounding the cost of living expenses and occupational wages for incarcerated individuals. Specifically, the Governor and Secretary would have access to the average cost of telephone calls, calls to medical providers, video calls, all purchasable commissary items including feminine hygiene products, toiletries, and medications. It would also list the age, race, and sex of currently employed inmates disaggregated by job classification and wage scale.

Sources (cited directly):

1. <https://www.cnn.com/2018/06/28/us/mass-incarceration-five-key-facts/index.html>

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House Bill 979 would bring to light a whole host of data that can be used to effectively sort out discrepancies and disparities designated by the prison industrial complex. For these reasons, we request a favorable report.

Sources (cited directly):

1. <https://www.cnn.com/2018/06/28/us/mass-incarceration-five-key-facts/index.html>