



## Testimony for the House Judiciary Committee

March 6, 2020

### HB 1414 Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services - Standards at State Correctional Facilities

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#### FAVORABLE

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The ACLU of Maryland supports HB 1414, which would put Maryland on record stating an intent to pay inmates fairly and equitably for their work, without discrimination. The bill further states that telephone services and items for sale inside correctional facilities should be sold at fair and reasonable market prices.

As of 2019, Maryland corrections workers earned between 17 cents and \$1.16 per hour.<sup>1</sup> These extremely low wages raise regarding remittance (i.e. inmates' ability to send funds home to support their families), but also indicate a deficit in affordability for paying for basic necessities, such as toiletries and food. The burden ends up being placed on incarcerated people and their families which ultimately punishes inmates for their poverty.

It is also common knowledge that there are discrepancies in the magnitude of upcharges of goods in prisons because of the lack of records, but there is no disputing that basic goods are more expensive in jail. Corrections companies often outsource the products, so either the companies or the commissaries themselves are increasing prices - according to some reports by up to 350%.<sup>2</sup> One common example is the price of Cup of Noodles. In a Florida prison that reported their commissary data, the equivalent of a 24-pack of ramen noodles costs nearly \$17 in prison compared to \$2 in a Walmart.<sup>5</sup> Multiple sources have reported a phone call - such as to doctors, lawyers, or family members - costs \$20.<sup>4, 5</sup> These are ridiculously high fees in comparison to daily earnings.

For the foregoing reasons, the ACLU of Maryland urges a favorable report on HB 1414.

<sup>1</sup> Knezevich, A. (2020, January 2). Thousands of Maryland inmates work in prison. A new law shows us how much they're paid. Retrieved February 17, 2020, from <https://www.baltimoresun.com/politics/bs-md-prison-wages-20200102-6kix5nzhtzfw3fmin662lcqcm-story.html>

<sup>2</sup> Graves, A. (2018, January 22). Claims about prison price-gouging decry \$17 soup, \$18 tampons. Retrieved February 17, 2020, from <https://www.politifact.com/article/2018/jan/22/claims-about-prison-price-gouging-decry-17-soup-18/>

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