

# JOTF JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

*Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes*

## **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1414:**

Correctional Services - Standards at State Correctional Facilities

**TO:** Chairman. Luke Clippinger, and members of the Judiciary Committee

**FROM:** Derrell Frazier, Policy Advocate

**DATE:** March 6, 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 1414 as a means to ensure that every prison in Maryland adheres to the following standards as it relates to incarcerated individuals & provides equitable procedures to ensure the success of rehabilitation of the facility.

According to a report published by the Department of Justice in 2017, The National Institute of Corrections (NIC) recognizes that jails today face unprecedented challenges in the form of burgeoning jail populations, escalating costs, crowding, increased public scrutiny, and litigation. In response to these challenges, many states have decided to implement jail standards and inspection programs to ensure that jails are operated safely and efficiently. Jail standards ensure that constitutional and statutory provisions are put into operational practice. These standards ensure a greater consistency across the state in jails' quality of care, use of resources, and operations. They also provide policymakers with a means of assessing and addressing the needs of inmates in a logical, objective way.

The current standards in the Maryland prison system are not generating results that reflect the mission statement, while currently disproportionately affecting the African American community. The purpose of prison is to help prisoners re-enter society after serving their time. The commissary and telecommunication services are not at a fair and reasonable rate, nor does DPCSC have any programs and or partnerships that will provide enough support inmates getting a job upon release. We must recreate a system where we are providing returning citizens with the support they need to be an active member in our community

In addition, with the lack of large state mental institutions, prisons have effectively become the new mental illness asylums. Prisoners suffer higher rates of communicable diseases, such as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)/acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) and hepatitis, than the general population, and chronic diseases such as diabetes are on the rise, especially among the growing older population of prisoners (National Commission on Correctional Health Care). Health care within some prison systems is less than satisfactory. Most recently, a federal district court judge placed California's entire prison medical health-care system into federal receivership, taking it out of control of the state and placing it under the control of a trustee appointed by the court.

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HB 1414 seeks to ensure that every state correctional facility adhere to specified standards relating to compensation to inmates for labor performed, providing jobs for incarcerated individuals, commissary rates, telecommunication service rates, training opportunities, and specified reentry partnerships.

Ensuring that the state support efforts to remove barriers to education and employment for workers with a criminal record enables qualified Marylanders to successfully re-enter the workforce. In an effort to ensure that individuals with a criminal record are able to obtain the essential resources needed and financial security, we respectfully urge a **FAVORABLE** report of HB 1414.