



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony of Senator Jill P. Carter
In Favor of SB0898 - Maryland Criminal Justice Debt
Elimination and Prevention Act of 2021
Before the Judicial Proceedings Committee
on March 10, 2021

Good Afternoon, Mr. Chair, Mr. Vice-Chair and Members of the Committee,

I am excited to present Senate Bill 898, the Maryland Criminal Justice Debt Elimination and Prevention Act of 2021 today. This is an ambitious bill that has many moving parts and far-reaching implications based on one unifying principle - that we, as a State, have decided that it is time to eradicate the criminalization of poverty in whatever corner of the Maryland Code it may be lurking.

It is time to make good on the promise enshrined in Section 38 of the Maryland Constitution - “No person shall be imprisoned for debt”. To realise this goal, Senate Bill 898 removes prison as a punishment from no fewer than nine

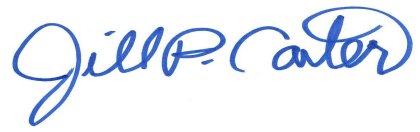
traffic offenses that turn on the defendants' ability to pay fines, fees, or costs. Further, it eliminates fees for expunging a criminal conviction, fees for room and board while a person is being held in local jail, fees for mandatory drug and alcohol testing, fees for the collection of restitution (not the restitution itself), fees for home detention, and fees for administration of a jury trial. These costs have made it nearly impossible for people of limited means to get on the right side of the criminal justice system even after they have completed their sentences and probation.

An important point of this bill is that it requires an indigency determination when assessing fines and costs. This is not wholesale elimination of all fines, fees, and costs.

I am not asking that we eliminate the consequences of wrongdoing, I am asking that we simply stop the criminalization of poverty.

This bill does exactly that. The benefits of bringing Marylanders back into productive, lawful citizenship are hard to quantify but are significant. Keeping someone imprisoned by debt long after they have served their sentence should not be our goal. As such, I request a favorable report from our committee on this bill.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jill P. Carter". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J" and a distinct "P" and "C".

Jill P. Carter