



Maryland
Hospital Association

March 8, 2022

To: The Honorable Luke Clippinger, Chair, House Judiciary Committee

Re: Letter of Support - House Bill 1058 - Justice and Public Health Prioritization Council

Dear Chair Clippinger:

On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's (MHA) 60 member hospitals and health systems, we appreciate the opportunity to comment in support of House Bill 1058, which would establish the Justice and Public Health Prioritization Council to invest in strategies prioritizing public health, increasing public safety, and reducing recidivism, ultimately reducing the state's incarcerated population and spending on corrections. This bill would address converging crises in our state—mental health and substance use disorder and the extreme racial disparities in incarceration.

One in five Marylanders suffer from mental health and substance use disorders. Those with these chronic conditions are senior citizens, adults, adolescents, and children. They are rich, poor, and middle class. Behavioral health conditions—mental health and substance use disorders—know no barriers and represent perhaps our greatest collective health challenge as a state and as a nation. Unfortunately, when patients seek care, they often face a shortage of qualified behavioral health practitioners and limited community-based resources. The result: they are often left in the shadows, crowding streets, hospital emergency departments, jails, and prisons, largely going without effective treatment and social services to help them to live healthier, more productive lives. The link between behavioral health issues and incarceration is well-established. A 2012 report from the Council of State Governments Justice Center found 53% of state prisoners nationwide met the criteria for substance dependence and 16% were estimated to have a mental illness.

Maryland leads the country in racial disparity among those serving long prison terms. More than 70% of people in Maryland prisons and nearly eight in 10 people in prison who have served 10 years or more are Black. These disparities are rooted in practices that target communities of color, a lack of investment and opportunity in historically disadvantaged neighborhoods, and an overly punitive sentencing, parole, and corrections system that focuses on punishment with insufficient attention given to programming and rehabilitative services that improve public safety outcomes.

Maryland hospitals support investments in justice reform strategies that both increase public safety and reduce recidivism—especially for Marylanders struggling with mental illness and/or substance misuse disorders. It's critically important that savings from criminal justice reforms be reinvested into the long-term care of individuals with behavioral health needs, so they receive the care they need to avert future brushes with law enforcement. This type of investment will help

stabilize costs by reducing the risk of recidivism. The Council, which would be comprised of a broad group of experts and stakeholders, is a reasonable approach to develop solutions.

For these reasons, we urge a *favorable* report on HB 1058.

For more information, please contact:
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