

February 6, 2023

To the Honorable Senator's of the State of Maryland,

My name is Donald Bovello, I am a returning Juvenile Lifer who served 35 years, 3 months and 8 days of a life and twenty year sentence in Maryland's prisons.

I am writing in support of the Correctional Ombudsman bill and ask that you would please consider supporting this bill as it is a necessary piece of legislation to bring change to Maryland corrections.

While in prison, I saw and experienced my atrocities inflicted upon inmates who were helpless and vulnerable. It is a common practice for correctional officers to beat inmates into compliance with what correctional officers want them to do, or in retaliation for a verbal comment made by the inmate.

A situation may be that an inmate, safely and securely locked in a prison cell, will get frustrated and express this negatively with a verbal comment. The inmate is told to shut-up, failure to comply with that order results in the inmate being physically removed from the locked cell, handcuffed behind their back, then taken to an area with no cameras or witnesses and beaten and kicked while handcuffed behind their back.

This physical and the frequent verbal abuse by correctional officers turned many inmates into dangerous, violent individuals.

The abuse described here was not only used upon inmates from the general population, but also upon inmates in the mental health unit, disciplinary and administrative segregation, all of whom spend 23 hours a day locked in a prison cell.

Maryland's correctional officers do not have an easy job, but they chose that career and accepted the responsibility for the human lives under their watch. In doing so, their job is to protect society, corrections employees and the inmates. The reality is that many of these employees believe their job is to punish inmates and abuse their authority.

When auditors or guests enter the prisons, they are kept away from the majority of the inmate population who may report abuses, and are guided to specific areas of the prisons which have been scrubbed, painted and deodorized to present a picture of a well run institution. Again not the day-to-day reality.

While there are corrections employees who treat inmates inhumanely, those who go to work each day in these potentially dangerous prisons and do their job correctly, they are outnumbered by abusive and/or corrupt corrections employees.

It is important to note that when inmates attempt to use the Administrative Remedy Process (ARP), they are discouraged by correctional officers when seeking to obtain an ARP form, then by correctional supervisors who are asked to sign and submit the ARP form. Many times, inmates are also encouraged by ARP coordinators to sign-off or dismiss the ARP with a promise of change, a change which doesn't come. The ARP process is frustrating and discouraging.

Also, when visitors or dignitaries enter the facility, there is a major clean-up and visitors and dignitaries are ushered to specific areas around specific inmates who are told how to behave prior to contact with any visitor or dignitary.

These are reasons that independent oversight is necessary to provide a true picture of what is happening within the Maryland prisons.

A Correctional Ombudsman would compliment corrections by providing oversight where needed and helping those corrections employee's who take their responsibility seriously and want to make Maryland's prison's safer, and in that way, maintaining and environment which is conducive to lowering recidivism.

Thank you for your time and consideration of the Correctional Ombudsman bill.

Respectfully,

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