

Senate Bill 512: Correctional Oversight Ombudsman

February 6, 2023

My name is Lucresha Mints, an inmate at the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women (MCI-W), and I am writing to you in support of SB512 given the misconduct, neglect, and inadequate care I have experienced at MCI-W. Due to the lack of outside oversight and widespread misconduct, incarcerated people often experience acts of violence, verbal abuse, and inadequate medical care, with little to no ability to successfully file a complaint or seek meaningful recourse. I am one of those people.

I was sexually assaulted on June 15, 2019, at MCI-W. I am diagnosed with two medical conditions, Multiple Sclerosis and Lupus, which cause me to suffer occasional health crisis. On June 15, 2019 I suffered a crisis and I was found unconscious in my cell at 11:42 pm by an officer who immediately had me transported to the prison medical department. As I began to awaken within a holding room, I felt a knee in my back, an arm around my neck, and severe vaginal pain. I urinated on myself. The pressure from the arm on my neck made me go unconscious again. I woke up in the Howard County General Hospital ICU with a tube down my throat, vaginal pain, bruises on my right inner thigh, a burnt nose, and a busted lip. I reported my assault to a nurse at the hospital, who called MCI-W to inform them that I was asking for a rape kit. A prison lieutenant came to the hospital and whispered to another officer in the room. The officer then told the ICU nurse I was suicidal, which is false. The prison protocol is to isolate “suicidal inmates”, thus making it hard to access support or report assaults.

Once returned to prison, I sought medical attention and was told to wait for observation by the medical staff. Two officers overstepped their custody roles and denied me further medical attention and harassed and threatened me. A different officer refused my right to contact someone within the PREA (Prison Rape Elimination Act) office. I was then put on lock in my cell by the shift commander at the time.

I filed a complaint through the Maryland Department of Public Service and Correctional Services' (DPSCS) Administrative Remedy Process (ARP) and did not receive a response until September 15, 2022. This process does not work. It can be extremely difficult to file a complaint and rarely is there meaningful recourse. The investigation department did not contact me about my investigation after speaking with a detective. PREA was then called, and the assistant warden was told to speak to me once a month, but rather than helping me with my situation, she was more concerned with the way I choose to wear my headscarf. PREA establishes standards for investigating sexual assault incidents and providing support for victims, but in reality, women like me face difficulty, possible retaliation, and staff members protecting their own interests during this process.

The institution covered up my rape by getting rid of my clothing and blanket, and they did not view the surveillance footage. I have documents that prove the institution tried to cover this rape up by saying, "I tried to kill myself" when I only asked for a rape kit. I have informed the investigative department of all the events leading up to my sexual assault and what happened when I woke up in my cell.

Having an independent oversight system, like the Office of Corrections Ombudsman, would protect women like me from abuse and neglect and ensure that DPSCS' own protocols are being followed. Within MCI-W, laws are being ignored and there is widespread misconduct. There should be a more transparent system in place, to protect inmates and staff from retaliation and create safer institutions. For these reasons I ask the committee to issue a favorable report on SB 512. Thank you.