

Deborah Shipman

Regarding Supporting and Creating an Office of Correctional Ombudsman in the State of
Maryland

Maryland's Prison System

My name is Deborah Shipman, and I am a concerned Maryland resident, an advocate, and a mother of a lifer with mental health needs in prison.

I am testifying on how the lack of funding for mental health care and the services have made it difficult for my son and the stress it has caused me. Communication (poor dialogue) between some incarcerated individuals and correctional officers is also problem.

Many individuals with mental illness face many challenges. Untrained officers are failing (intentionally/unintentionally) to communicate effectively with individuals. There are different levels of mental illnesses, and all are not the same. Training on mental illness is greatly needed. It has been observed, there is also a language barrier between the population and officers (English is spoken but the content is not understood fully sometimes).

There is a great need to hire highly qualified staff (medical and correctional officers) and mandatory appropriate training should be administered periodically. Everyone deserves access to appropriate mental health treatment, regular and access to mental health providers, and access to medications.

Son's Struggle

My son distrusts the institution. Him and others had observed the reaction of medication for mental illness been given to individuals. Later discovered they were given the wrong drug and suffered and did not recover fully from it. My son completed correspondence courses to help himself when confronted in certain situations. He still struggles with officers who intentionally ignores some of his requests, uses offensive language (curses), and is given untruthful facts. My son had been placed in solitary confinement with no explanation, when asked.

A problem with communication: Even before COVID, sometimes the population does not receive important/adequate supplies that a prison facility should have in stock. The institution response was (and it is still happening) supplies are not available in the facility, and they have to wait for a long period of time. To name a few supplies such as: toothbrushes, a great delay in mail delivery, inmate financial account. The latest issue now is **deodorant**.

Medical Issue in 2016

My concern was about my son's infected finger (black and green with puss secretion) which needed serious medical attention. He was given a lot of pain pills. On March 8, 2016, my son told me he sent a medical request on March 4, 2016, and was seen March 7, 2016. He said the nurse did not give him any antibiotics for his finger. The nurse told him she could not do nothing about his finger, and he will probably see a doctor next week.

On March 9, 2016, I spoke with a nurse at the facility in regards to the issue. The nurse said she will look into it and asked me to call her the next day. I tried to call her again and was not successful. The person who answered the call said the nurse will be in meetings all day. I also spoke with my son's case manager in hope to know whether or not my son was given antibiotics and his finger drained from the infection. I was told the HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) law prevents him and others from obtaining information from a person's medical records. I was later told he will have my son to call me and advised me to contact the Assistant Warden.

I felt a need to testify. Appropriate mental health and services along with excellent communication training can save lives in the prisons/jails and lessen the complaints to the Warden.

I have been indirectly affected by this issue. The concern was my son overdosing on pain pills that was given to him and losing a finger. The roadblock was, while the nurse was away, no one was available that was knowledgeable about my son's condition. I tried to contact others and no one could help me. I felt my son and others were unsafe in prison. There is a problem with the HIPAA Law which prevents a close family member on record to obtain information about, whether or not, immediate attention is being or was given to their love ones in prison/jail.

Individuals with mental illness face many challenges and do not need additional stress neither does their care takers outside the prison walls. Confined in a prison with burdens placed on them does not help them psychologically. Prison is not the way but evaluating and placing people with mental disabilities in a safe and environment is more promising for them and a great asset for our community.

Thank you for reading my testimony. Your consideration of this matter is very much appreciated.

Deborah Shipman