

February 7, 2023

The Honorable William Smith
2 East
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Letter in Support of SB0087 – Office of the Attorney General – Correctional Ombudsman

Dear Chairman Smith and the Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

I am Donna Rojas, and I am writing to you as a private citizen to express my strong support of SB0087 – Office of the Attorney General – Correctional Ombudsman (cross-filed with HB0064) to urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on this bill.

We have allowed the Maryland State prison system to remain without meaningful oversight for years. Various events in the media and those unmentioned have brought about a long-needed review of our Maryland prisons by the administration and your committee. As elected officials, you need the opportunity to go into the facility without advance notice to see what is transpiring with those individuals in the institution's custody.

An oversight office under the Attorney General will ensure that information necessary to the legislature and the public is brought forward promptly. Currently, constituent letters and inquiries are being answered by the constituent services department. The department sends the query to the appropriate department, which in turn responds, and the constituent services department responds based on what the department in question provides them with. No in-person investigation is conducted. This is unacceptable when you have inmates who are not receiving timely care, and their grievances take 45 – 90 days to respond to, or they go with no response. I have worked in Montgomery County and on the State level assisting incarcerated inmates pre-and post-release. I have never seen individuals, their requests, and family concerns falling on a deaf ear like with the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services. Only when it hits a major media outlet will DPSCS attend to the issue in a timely fashion.

This oversight will allow the legislature and the administration to proactively address safety and health issues for both Correctional Officers and the incarcerated before those issues become entrenched problems.

I ask you to do whatever you can to ensure a favorable vote on this bill.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Donna Rojas