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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
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**Testimony in Support of House Bill 536: Correctional Services Apprenticeship Start-Up Grant Program
– Establishment
February 21, 2024**

Chairs Wilson and Clippinger, Vice Chairs Crosby and Bartlett, and esteemed members of the Economic Matters and Judiciary Committees, it is my pleasure to come before you and offer testimony in favor of **House Bill 536: Correctional Services Apprenticeship Start-Up Grant Program – Establishment**. This bill creates an important tool in addressing dangerous workforce shortages in Maryland's correctional facilities, while enhancing public safety through registered apprenticeships.

Registered apprenticeships are a proven strategy for addressing workforce shortages and providing individuals with valuable skills and training opportunities. As we strive to meet our goals outlined in the Maryland Blueprint for Education, including the target of having 45% of high school students complete an apprenticeship or industry credential, we need to be intentional and creative in designing our apprenticeship opportunities.

This bill allocates a \$500,000 grant, which has already been designated for apprenticeships, to a sponsor organization composed of at least three correctional institutions (local and state) and at least one union representing correctional facility employees. This funding will support the development and implementation of apprenticeship programs in a variety of fields involved in correctional services, including social work, medical clinical work, and data analysis.

I am also working with unions on an amendment to the bill that will ensure they are able to exercise the full extent of their bargaining rights in developing apprenticeship programs and deciding which positions are apprenticeable.

As reported in Secretary Scruggs's testimony on Senate Bill 470 on February 9th, the average age in Maryland Corrections is 39 years old. This underscores the need to attract a new generation of talent to the field of correctional services and ensure a sustainable supply of new talent. **House Bill 536** aligns with the objectives of House Bill 597, Growing Apprenticeships and the Public Safety Workforce (GAPS) Act in taking a comprehensive approach to diversifying and strengthening all sectors of the public safety workforce for safer communities.

The need to address workforce shortages in Maryland correctional facilities is urgent, and while efforts to merge House Bill 536 and House Bill 597 are still ongoing, I urge a favorable report on **House Bill 536**. By investing in apprenticeship opportunities and promoting career pathways in public safety, we can ensure a safer Maryland for all.

Bernice Mireku-North