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For Senate Bill 36 and House Bill 565

My name is William Haines. I am Campus Manager for Levine Music in Silver Spring and in my third year as a court watcher for bond hearings in Prince George's County.

Our society does little to **try to know** whether we are meeting our responsibilities to those we incarcerate. Those who are jailed and sick cannot easily report their circumstances or defend their rights. That falls on us.

Countless reports suggest that in many jails and prisons,

the **food** is unhealthy,

**heating** is poor in winter,

**cooling** is poor in summer,

air **filtration** is poor year-round,

**sanitation** is token,

**violence** is familiar,

**stress** is a constant,

**contact with family and friends** is minimized,

**medical care is nominal,**

**barriers to medical appointments** are high.

**Solitary confinement**, which has been shown to damage both mental and physical health, is used to separate children from gen pop, to slow contagion, and to manage the mentally ill. Over 40% of people incarcerated in America have been diagnosed with a mental illness, which in turn puts their physical health at risk.

Maryland jails and prisons may be seriously under-resourced to protect people from the dangers we impose. Our response should not be that we don't want to hear about it.

As a court watcher I have been paying attention to the Prince George's County jail, where the Department of Corrections houses primarily people who have not been found to need correcting. That jail is an example of why we need this legislation.

From 2008 to 2019, at least 13 inmates died there, 12 of them pretrial, most in their first ten days inside. All before COVID.

On March 5, 2020, Governor Hogan declared a statewide catastrophic health emergency. Six weeks later, inmates sued the jail over medical care. About 5% of all inmates submitted affidavits in support, and the court sent an expert inspector at the end of April. On May 21, in a formal [opinion](#) on motions, Federal District Court Judge Paula Xinis wrote that the jail, in the person of the Director, “exhibited a reckless disregard for provision of basic care” (p.26). Six weeks into the emergency, only 20 tests had been administered, 18 of them positive. The jail had another 20 kits, but there was no plan to get more (p.7). The court’s expert wrote, “Nurses lack a basic understanding of COVID-19 symptoms and their dereliction was patent” (p.13). Sanitation was largely absent, appointments were refused, those at high risk were not separated, and the medical unit lacked properly functioning thermometers.

A settlement agreement with rules of care and inspection expired in Decmeber 2021, at the height of the greatest known outbreak in the jail.

Since then, the jail’s staffing levels have collapsed. In June 2023, NBC affiliate News4 [reported](#) that uniformed staff had “dropped from 446 at the start of 2020 to just 310 officers this year, with the county now seeking to fill about 175 vacancies.”

Please pass this bill to set up the Maryland Deaths in Custody Oversight Board, so that we can at least have a better idea whether we are meeting our responsibilites and what remains undone.

Thank you very much.

Respectfully submitted,  
William Haines