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## WRITTEN TESTIMONY SUPPORTING

### SB36 partnered bill HB565

### Maryland Deaths in Custody Oversight Board

TO: Sponsors of the bill Senator Benson-SB0036 and Delegate Simmons-HB565

DATE: 2-6-2024

My name is Dawna Cobb. I am a co-founder of Return Home Baltimore, an online resource for formerly incarcerated people, and a Maryland resident. I strongly support **SB036/HB565** because it addresses the longstanding and ongoing national crisis of deaths occurring in custody. The need for this law is supported by the findings in a report entitled *In-Custody Deaths in Ten Maryland Detention Centers 2008-2019*, published in July 2023 by the [UCLA Biocritical Studies Lab](#) and by [American Bar Association](#).

It is unacceptable that neither the United States nor Maryland governments possesses accurate data on the annual number of deaths in custody. The absence of clear, accessible information hampers the ability of policymakers, researchers, and advocates to instigate meaningful changes aimed at reducing preventable in-custody deaths. SB36 and HB 565 rectifies this issue.

According to the UCLA Biocritical Studies Lab, 180 deaths were recorded in 10 Maryland county detention centers from 2008 to 2019. It's worth noting that county detention centers differ from state prisons in that they primarily house individuals awaiting trial or arraignment. This means that many died in-custody before a trial. Maryland must demonstrate its commitment to transparency and accountability with the goal of reducing in-custody deaths by creating a Custody Oversight Board that is authorized to investigate in-custody deaths and recommend actions to avoid further in-custody fatalities.

**SB36/HB565** is designed to:

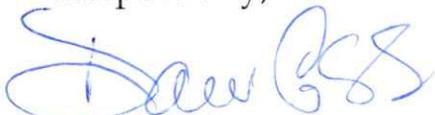
- ensure transparency and accountability within Maryland's custody system. It aims to guarantee that when an individual dies while in custody, the pertinent details become publicly accessible.
- pinpoint and rectify the primary causes of such deaths while safeguarding the well-being and dignity of those in custody.
- establish an independent Oversight Board that will review all in-custody deaths in Maryland, issue detailed reports that elucidate the circumstances leading to each fatality, recommend actions to prevent similar deaths, and oversee the implementation of these suggestions.

The bill also requires:

- The agency responsible for an individual in custody to promptly notify the Oversight Board within a certain amount of time of the person's death;
- The notification to provide specific information about the deceased individual, encompassing their name, birth date, gender, race, and ethnicity, and a comprehensive description of the circumstances surrounding the death and the rationale behind the person's detention;
- The Oversight Board to analyze each case, draw conclusions, and offer recommendations concerning the individual's death.

Thank you for offering to support this bill, which addresses an important issue for Maryland.

Respectfully,



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