

# HELPING OURSELVES TO TRANSFORM

EDUCATING AND PROMOTING  
MASS LIBERATION

5661 3rd Street NE Unit 134 Wash, DC 20011  
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**Dear President Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Committee,**

I am Dr. Carmen Johnson and I reside in Anne Arundel County, Maryland. I am here to urge you to **vote favorably** for SB036/HB565, a critical piece of legislation aimed directly at the heart of a national catastrophe: the unacceptable and preventable deaths occurring within our custody system. The stark reality that our nation lacks comprehensive data on in-custody deaths is not merely an oversight; it is a glaring indictment of our moral and administrative systems. This deficiency obstructs any effort towards systemic reform, leaving us in the dark about the true scale of this crisis.

Maryland's own statistics paint a grim picture, with 885 lives lost in the Department of Corrections from January 2009 to March 2023, and an additional 180 fatalities in county detention centers between 2008 and 2019. These numbers reveal the urgency of addressing this epidemic, particularly as many victims are pre-trial detainees who never had their day in court. It is imperative that Maryland lead the way in fostering a culture of transparency and accountability, setting a new standard for the nation in the process of mitigating in-custody deaths. SB36/HB565 stands as a beacon of hope, designed to usher in a new era of openness and responsibility within Maryland's custody environment. It ensures that each death while in custody is not just a statistic but a catalyst for change, with details made public to inform and drive reform. The establishment of an independent Oversight Board is a monumental step towards achieving this goal. This board will undertake comprehensive investigations into every in-custody death, providing insights and actionable recommendations to prevent future tragedies.

The proposed legislation mandates immediate notification to the Oversight Board following any custodial death, with detailed information about the deceased. This procedure is not just an administrative task; it is a moral obligation to each individual under our care. The Oversight Board's rigorous analysis and subsequent recommendations will form the cornerstone of our efforts to honor the dignity of those we've lost and to protect those still within our system. The term "In-custody death" encompasses a broad spectrum of circumstances, underscoring the pervasive nature of this issue across various facets of law enforcement and detention. This bill is not just legislation; it is a declaration that the lives of all individuals, regardless of their custodial status, are of inherent value. I implore you to recognize the urgency of this matter and to vote favorably. It is time for Maryland to illuminate the shadows of our custody system with the light of accountability and humanity. Thank you for considering this vital cause that holds the potential to save lives and restore faith in our justice system.

Sincerely,

*Carmen Johnson Ph.D.*  
Founder



# THE PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT

(301) 952-3700  
County Council

## POSITION STATEMENT

SB 36

Senator Benson

Maryland Deaths in Custody Oversight Board

### POSITION

### FAVORABLE

This bill creates a Custody Oversight Board to make findings and recommendations related to deaths of incarcerated individuals and requires the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services to provide information to the Board.

**Prince George's County Council strongly supports this bill.**

The County Council supports this bill because it addresses the crisis of deaths occurring in custody. In Maryland alone, from **January 2009 to March 2023, approximately 885 individuals lost their lives within the Department of Corrections.** Many of these tragic incidents resulted from the unnecessary use of force and neglect within the criminal legal system. We want Maryland to possess accurate data on the annual number of deaths in custody and the causes. 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. We want Maryland to set a precedent by demonstrating a commitment to transparency and accountability, with the goal of reducing in-custody deaths through improved adherence to established procedures and policies.

For the foregoing reasons, Prince George's County Council respectfully requests the Committee's favorable consideration of the legislation.

*Prepared by: Barnes International on behalf of Prince George's County Council.*

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