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February 1, 2024

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.  
11 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair Smith and Judiciary Proceedings Committee Members:

I write in support of SB0004—Criminal Law—Criminal Procedure—Victims' Rights—Notification of Release from Confinement. I am the Chief of the Special Victims Division for the Montgomery County State's Attorney's Office. My division is responsible for prosecuting cases involving child abuse and exploitation, domestic violence, elder abuse, sexual assault, and human trafficking. Among other multidisciplinary teams, I am a member and former Chair of the Montgomery County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council, and the current Chair of the Montgomery County Elder/Vulnerable Adult Abuse Task Force. I am also a member of the Governor's Family Violence Council.

Currently, Section 11-508 of the Criminal Procedure Article requires a commitment unit, i.e., a unit that a court orders to retain custody of a defendant and to receive a notification request forms, to provide certain notifications to witnesses to and victims of crime. The current statutory structure, however, does not require a commitment unit to provide the victim or witness contact information for the local victim-witness coordinator in the State's Attorney's Office where the crime was committed.

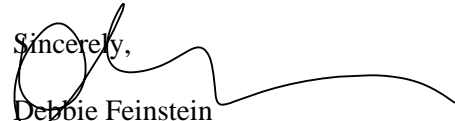
Senate Bill 4 adds a provision to the victim notification law that requires the commitment unit to make a specific notification to the victim or witness: "When a sentenced defendant or child respondent is being released from confinement, the commitment unit shall include in the notification . . . the name and telephone number of the lead victim services employee of the State's Attorney's Office of the county in which the defendant or child respondent was prosecuted."

In Maryland, sentenced individuals receive good time and diminution credits and a numerical sentence is often not the actual time served in confinement. While prosecutors strive to explain this process to victims and witnesses at the time of the sentencing, many victims and witnesses are surprised to learn that the defendant has been released from confinement far short of the numerical number they heard at the time of sentencing. In addition, the actual release date constantly changes during the course of the sentence.

Senate Bill 4 gives victims and witnesses a specific contact person to reach out to with questions following the defendant's release from confinement. This extra layer of communication will provide victims and witnesses with needed support.

I urge this Committee to issue a favorable report on SB0004.

Sincerely,

  
Debbie Feinstein  
Chief, Special Victims Division  
Senior Assistant State's Attorney