



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

SB 694 – Correctional Services – Assessment of State Correctional System

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, Members of JPR:

SB 694 would require the Correctional Ombudsman to hire an independent consultant to perform a comprehensive assessment of the State's correctional system.

I intended to sponsor a comprehensive bill this session that would end the practice of locking incarcerated individuals in their cells for 23 hours a day, 7 days a week – known as “restrictive housing.” Delegate Phillips and I dug into the issue. We toured Jessup, met with Secretary Scruggs, the Warden at Jessup and others; we spoke with the sponsors of the laws banning solitary in New York and New Jersey; we spoke with the heads of Corrections in New York and New Jersey to find out how implementation of the laws was going and if there were ways to make the law better; we spoke with members of AFSCME; and we spoke with advocates and people who had spent time in restrictive housing.

Through these discussions, we came to understand that our correctional system needs a massive amount of work. We need more correctional officers. We need facilities that are configured better for today's system. We need more and better programming. We need better care of those who need mental and physical health services. We need to have a new approach such that we don't use restrictive housing the way we do now.

SB 694 will require the Ombudsman to hire an independent consultant who will review all of these things, look at best practices around the country, and come up with a roadmap for our correctional system. The roadmap will include things we can change now, with no money; in the short to mid-term with some money; and long-term with more money.

With this roadmap, we can begin to fix our correctional system and set us on the path for a better system in the future.

For the foregoing reasons, I ask for a favorable report on SB 694.