

SB 694_Jo Shifrin_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Jo Shifrin

Position: FAV

Date of Hearing: February 19, 2025

Jo Shifrin
Bethesda, MD 20817

TESTIMONY ON SB 694 - POSITION: FAVORABLE
Correctional Services - Assessment of State Correctional System

TO: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Jo Shifrin

OPENING: My name is Jo Shifrin. I am a resident of District 16. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of SB 694, Correctional Services - Assessment of State Correctional System.

I moved to Bethesda 10 years ago to be near my grandchildren. My support for this legislation comes from my grounding in Jewish values. Among these values are *Tikkun Olam*, an obligation to make the world a more fair and equitable place for people to live.

I believe that the way we incarcerate people leads to higher costs for the state. I also believe that the way incarcerated people are treated does not result in them being able to re-enter society as productive, law-abiding members of the community. There are best practices in other states and in other countries that we could learn from and replicate here in Maryland. And I believe that the best way to achieve that is to do an assessment of the system, look at what is not working and change it.

I respectfully urge the Committee to return a favorable report on SB 694.

Support_SB 694_Corrections Assessment_Barry.pdf

Uploaded by: Margaret Barry

Position: FAV

MARGARET MARTIN BARRY
Testimony Submitted to
THE SENATE JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS COMMITTEE

IN SUPPORT OF SB 694, ASSESSMENT OF STATE CORRECTIONAL SYSTEM

I urge the Committee to favorably report SB 694 and support its passage through the Senate. SB 694 provides for a much-needed comprehensive assessment of Maryland's correctional system.

Maryland correctional facilities fail in a number of areas due to external and internal problems. This legislation would require a systemic assessment of where these problems lie. A less than comprehensive list of issues that require attention is:

1. Facilities are overcrowded. This is due to sentencing practices and requirements, and overly conservative and poorly executed parole practices. It is also due to prison practices that create tension and offer little opportunity for or encouragement in rehabilitation.
2. Facilities are understaffed, and this is compensated for by poor practices that include excessive use of overtime. This is both expensive and undermines effective facility management.
3. Health care is inadequate, and downright dangerous. The poor state of healthcare for incarcerated people in the Maryland correctional system has been documented, including alarm at the recent provider contract. Vastly improved quality of care and rational fees for health services are sorely needed.
4. Abuse of those housed in correctional facilities by other incarcerated persons and by correctional officers is said to be widespread. The extent of this and the best practices for addressing it are essential. Throwing incarcerated people in restrictive housing indefinitely and ignoring the actions of correctional officers are not effective responses.
5. Incarcerated persons and correctional officers have raised concerns about retaliation for reporting misconduct. This not only inhibits addressing problems, it encourages abuse and distrust.

6. There is significant lack of access to jobs, skills training, other education, and rehabilitation programs. It is important to fully understand what is limiting these important aspects of meeting facility goals for rehabilitation and effective management.
7. Obstacles to family visitation are common. Scheduling is changed, the incarcerated family members are removed to other institutions without warning, rules for visiting family members are confusing, and incarcerated people are denied visits for a wide variety of reasons that are experienced as arbitrary. These obstacles unnecessarily undermine the important connection to family and other community support that helps those incarcerated succeed in prison and upon release.

In addition to identifying and assessing correctional system problems, the legislation asks for recommendations and an implementation plan for practices that have been proven to be effective elsewhere. Hopefully, those recommendations and that plan will underscore the need for strong leadership that can envision and enthusiastically support the changes Maryland's correctional system desperately needs and those connected with it deserve.

Respectfully submitted,
Margaret Martin Barry
Emeritus Professor of Law
Resident, D-16

SB 694 Assessment of State Correctional System - L

Uploaded by: Sara Love

Position: FAV



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.

SB 694_AFSCME3_FWA.pdf

Uploaded by: Denise Gilmore

Position: FWA



1410 Bush Street (Suite A)
Baltimore, MD 21230
Phone: 410-547-1515
Email: info@afscmemd.org

Patrick Moran – President

**SB 694 – Correctional Services – Assessment of State Correctional System
Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 19, 2025**

Position: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

AFSCME Council 3 represents correctional employees within our state prison system. This legislation mandates the Office of the Correctional Ombudsman to conduct an independent and comprehensive assessment of Maryland's correctional system. While we do not believe it is necessary to hire an outside consultant for this task, we fully support an assessment that covers key areas such as facility infrastructure, staffing, programming, healthcare, and restrictive housing policies within the department. For this assessment to be truly effective, it is essential that our members—who are the frontline staff in our prisons—be explicitly included as key stakeholders and consulted throughout the process. Additionally, we want to ensure that our members' rights to negotiate any changes to working conditions or terms of employment remain protected before any modifications resulting from the assessment are implemented.

As such, we urge the committee to consider the following amendments:

AFSCME Amendment to SB 694

Amendment 1:

On Pg. 4: In (2), insert "INCLUDING AFSCME" in line 1 –
REFLECT THE INPUT OF STAKEHOLDERS, **INCLUDING AFSCME**, AND
INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS BY MEANS OF:

Amendment 2:

On. Pg. 4: In (C), insert at the end of line 28 –
**THE OFFICE SHALL FORWARD THE FINDINGS AND RECOMENDATIONS TO THE
RELEVANT EXCLUSIVE REPRESENTATIVE, AND AS APPROPRIATE, REFER ANY
PROPOSED RECOMMENDATION FOR BARGAINING.**

With these amendments, we support SB 694. Thanks for your consideration.