

**Testimony in Support of House Bill HB878
Workers' Compensation – Occupational Disease Presumption – Correctional Officers – Carroll
County**

To the Honorable Chair and Members of the Committee:

My name is Matthew J. Engler and I am an attorney who has represented countless public safety professionals, including correctional officers, across the State of Maryland. I respectfully submit this testimony **in strong support of House Bill HB878**, which would extend workers' compensation protections for heart disease and hypertension to correctional officers employed in Carroll County.

Maryland's Current Law Creates Unequal Protection for Correctional Officers

Maryland law has, for decades, recognized that certain public safety professions face occupational hazards that significantly increase the risk of cardiovascular disease. For that very reason, §9-503 of the Maryland Labor and Employment Article establishes a presumption that heart disease and hypertension are occupational diseases for these professions. It includes police officers, firefighters, as well as some correctional officers *from only certain jurisdictions*.

Unfortunately, Maryland's statutory framework provides these protections **unevenly among correctional officers depending on the jurisdiction in which they serve**. As a result, correctional officers in some counties receive this protection while others performing the same duties do not. For example, correctional officers in Montgomery or Prince George's Counties can claim the benefit of this law, while those in Carroll County cannot. **This inconsistency is fundamentally unfair**. Correctional officers in Carroll County confront the same dangerous working conditions, occupational stressors, and demanding schedules as their counterparts elsewhere in Maryland, yet they lack the same statutory protection.

HB878 corrects this inequity by ensuring that Carroll County correctional officers receive the same protections afforded to correctional officers in other jurisdictions.

Medical Research Demonstrates Elevated Health Risks for Correctional Officers

Peer-reviewed research demonstrates that correctional officers face **significant health risks associated with the structure and demands of correctional work**, including elevated risk factors for chronic cardiovascular disease.¹ In fact, the correctional environment requires constant vigilance, around-the-clock conflict, exposure to potentially dangerous situations, and long working hours, all of which contribute to chronic occupational stress and adverse health outcomes.

Shift Work and Irregular Schedules Increase Cardiovascular Risk

Another major contributor to cardiovascular risk among correctional officers is the **prevalence of rotating shifts, overnight schedules, and mandatory overtime** required to maintain continuous correctional operations.

A large systematic review and meta-analysis examining the relationship between shift work and cardiovascular disease found that shift work is associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease events.² Importantly, the study found that “the risk of cardiovascular disease events **increased by approximately 7% for every additional five years of exposure** to shift work. (emphasis supplied)”³

Additional epidemiological research examining night-shift workers similarly concluded that **night shift work is associated with increased risk of cardiovascular disease (including hypertension)**, particularly among workers exposed to long-term irregular work schedules.⁴

HB878 Promotes Fairness and Consistency in Maryland Law

Maryland has already recognized that certain public safety occupations carry risks significant enough to warrant presumptive workers’ compensation coverage for heart disease and hypertension. The medical literature demonstrates that correctional officers face many of the same occupational stressors and cardiovascular risks.

Extending this presumption to Carroll County correctional officers simply ensures that Maryland law is **applied fairly and consistently**, regardless of the county in which an officer serves. HB878 represents a reasonable and fair step to ensure that these public servants receive equal protection under Maryland’s Workers’ Compensation Act. For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to **issue a favorable report on House Bill HB878**.

Respectfully submitted,

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References

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