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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of HB 1018 Correctional Services - Immigration Detention Facilities - Minimum Mandatory Standards

Testimony by Delegate Vaughn Stewart
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Overview of the Bill

When a locked custodial facility fails — whether through medical neglect, power loss, fire risk, or emergency breakdown — the consequences do not stay inside the fence line. They land on taxpayers, first responders, hospitals, and public infrastructure. HB1018 is designed to prevent those failures from becoming public emergencies and public expenses.

HB1018 is a public safety, operational readiness, and taxpayer protection bill. It strengthens Maryland's correctional standards framework to ensure that correctional facilities and immigration detention facilities located in the State are subject to meaningful standards, inspections, certifications, and enforcement mechanisms.

Why HB1018 Is Needed: Failures Externalize Costs To Taxpayers And Communities

When custodial facilities fail—medically, operationally, or in emergency preparedness—the consequences are not contained within facility walls. The costs shift to:

- **taxpayers** (liability, emergency procurement, overtime);
- **ratepayers** (utility upgrades and reliability risks);
- **local hospitals and EMS** (transport, guard details, capacity strain);
- **first responders** (fire/evacuation events, public-safety incidents).

Recent examples illustrate the stakes:

- **Catastrophic medical failure becomes a public cost event.** Scott County, Minnesota agreed to a \$12.2 million settlement after a man jailed for suspected DUI allegedly did not

receive timely medical care and later suffered severe medical consequences including amputations.

- **Detention and EMS costs can overwhelm budgets through overtime and staffing shortages.** Charleston County, South Carolina reported overtime spending at both its detention center and EMS surged by nearly \$4 million beyond budget limits, with detention officers working extended shifts and paramedics earning overtime exceeding base pay.
- **Utilities failures become immediate public-safety risks and trigger emergency public spending.** Platte County, Wyoming obtained \$150,000 in emergency money for a new jail backup generator after a failure left deputies unable to use cameras, communicate effectively, or control cell door locks during an outage.
- **Oversight findings and investigative reporting continue to document serious medical neglect risks in detention settings.** Senator Jon Ossoff's investigation reported dozens of credible reports of medical neglect and inadequate access to basic necessities in immigration detention, underscoring the importance of enforceable oversight and reporting pathways.

These are not abstract policy concerns—they are examples of how weak standards and weak oversight convert into financial exposure and public-system strain.

What HB 1018 Does: Concrete, Enforceable “Readiness Gates”

HB1018 strengthens the Maryland Commission on Correctional Standards' role in advising on standards and coordinating with state and local partners. It also directs the Commission to implement inspections and certify compliance, including deadlines for remedial action and reinspection when facilities are out of compliance.

Most importantly for operational safety—and for preventing unfunded public burdens—HB1018 requires annual utility and emergency preparedness certification. Facilities must certify adequate and reliable utilities (including potable water, sewer, and electricity), functional HVAC, an emergency power system, and an emergency operations plan addressing utility disruptions, security breaches, fires, and medical emergencies. The facility must also provide supporting documentation and respond to additional information requests.

HB1018 creates real consequences for noncompliance. If a facility fails to submit the required certification or documentation, the Commission must treat the deficiency as life-threatening or health-endangering and order immediate cessation of operation or take other necessary protective action.

Additionally, HB1018 protects the integrity of inspections: owners, operators, managers, and employees may not impede inspections or audits. If they do, the Commission must order immediate cessation of operation.

Why The Committee Should Vote Favorably: Risk Management And Fiscal Responsibility

HB1018 is not a sitting veto and not a symbolic statement. It is a risk-management framework that:

- forces documentation of infrastructure readiness before emergencies happen;
- strengthens inspection and remediation pathways;
- prevents obstruction of oversight;
- reduces the likelihood that local hospitals, EMS, utilities, and taxpayers become the “backstop” when facilities cut corners.

By requiring custodial facilities to prove readiness and maintain emergency preparedness on the record, the bill helps ensure that operators internalize risks rather than shifting them onto the public.

For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report on HB1018.