

TESTIMONY - HB 778 – Correctional Officers' Retirement System - Membership

Appropriations

February 27, 2020

Support with Amendments

Hello Madam Chair/Mr. Vice-Chair and members of this committee. I appreciate you taking the time out to hear my today.

My name is Ashley Watson and I am a Case Management Specialist for the Department of Juvenile Services. I am also a proud member of Afscme local 3167. I have worked for the Department of Juvenile Services for approximately 12 years. Although being a Case Manager for at-risk youth is a rewarding career it can also be very dangerous. As a Case Manager we not only have to rehabilitate the at-risk youth, but the family as a whole. Case Management Specialist are responsible for these youth on a daily basis in DJS facilities, courthouses, schools and now more and more in the neighborhoods which has become extremely dangerous. A Case Management Specialist is basically juvenile probation officers; we oversee the conditions of probation for our youth as well at re-integrating families and communities back together. While meeting the needs of our youth we encounter some serious obstacles, most of our youth have serious mental health issues stemming from multiple traumas that have occurred in their lives making it hard to address the needs of our youth. This requires that Case Mangers really work

diligently and long endless hours on their caseloads to ensure the youth are getting the proper education, therapy, and many other things that are intertwined to ensure their complete rehabilitation. While Parole & Probation officers and DJS Case Managers require the same education and training, DJS Case Managers are responsible for the at-risk youth on a greater level than an adult probation officer. We are responsible for more than just explaining their conditions of probation and sending them back into the community. DJS Case Managers often have heavy caseloads due to short staffing that is brought on by losing great and dedicated employees to other agencies that offer 20 year retirement with a smaller caseload and less responsibility. If anyone on this committee knows about working with a young population the first thing to success is getting them to trust you. While the state is in a staffing crisis we are losing case managers at a higher rate than before making it hard for these youth to successfully complete their probation because they have to learn to entrust their future with different Case Manager after Case Manager. I am asking that this committee support this bill because it will not only help retain staff. Also because Maryland's youth deserve to work with the most dedicated case management specialist that Maryland has to offer making this one less obstacle they have to deal with while being rehabilitated in the juvenile justice system.