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Testimony

HB 622 – Correctional Services – Correctional Officers – Minimum Age Requirement

Recommendation: Unfavorable

AFSCME Council 3 is the union that represents State of Maryland Correctional Officers and we oppose HB 622. In a nutshell, we do not believe that 19, (or even 20) is an age that provides enough life experience to respond to the many challenges a Correctional Officer faces in a state prison setting. An individual just out of high school would be faced with some inmates who have survived due to their skill at manipulating others as well as some inmates who are extremely angry and have no one else to lash out at beyond Correctional Officers. Being sworn at and having bodily fluids flung out at oneself, are just the beginning of the challenges. This takes place within an environment in which Correctional Officers are vastly outnumbered by inmates, and demands of mandatory overtime lead to a state of exhaustion.

Maryland already tried lowering the age to 18. In 2002 it was lowered to that age, and then in 2007 increased back up to 21. The reasons above were a large part of that reversal. Maryland also recently tried hiring below age 21 for its “Cadet” program. Although there were over 1000 applicants, only 3 were hired and none have made it to becoming a Correctional Officer.

Some states hire below the age of 21, however, the vast majority of the country relies on age 21 or older as the minimum requirements for Correctional Officers. There is an understandable exception for those who have served in the armed forces and therefore have some greater experiences beyond high school.

There is no group more aware of the shortage of Correctional Officers than our AFSCME members. They are the victims of mandatory overtime and stressful working conditions. However, the answer is not to lower the age. It lies in large part in increasing the compensation for this incredibly difficult job. The Hogan administration has decided to not provide these employees with a 1% increase in January, or a 2% increase in July in spite of this problem. They have tried bonuses which do not to increase the base salary or pension. Please urge them to take the course of increasing pay, not lowering the age.

Every AFSCME Maryland State and University contract guarantees a right to union representation.
An employee has the right to a union representative if requested by the employee.
800.492.1996

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