



Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services

Office of the Secretary Office of Government and Legislative Affairs

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BILL: HOUSE BILL 622

POSITION: SUPPORT

EXPLANATION: This bill lowers the minimum age (from 21 to 19) for a correctional officer hired by the Division of Correction (DOC), the Division of Pretrial Detention and Services (DPDS), or the Patuxent Institution beginning October 1, 2020.

COMMENTS: This bill will assist the Department in its efforts to hire and recruit qualified correctional officers. Not only will this bill increase the Department's ability to capitalize on existing hiring incentives, including SmartWork and the Cadet program, but it will better align the Department with hiring practices across the State and nation.

- The Department has prioritized recruitment, hiring, and retention of correctional officers.
 - Competitive Salaries – Since December 2018, correctional officer salaries have increased by nearly 10%. The starting salary of a Correctional Officer II is now \$44,691.
 - Offering Recruitment Incentives – The Department offers a \$5,000 hiring bonus so a new correctional officer can quickly take home \$50,000.
 - Streamlining the Hiring Process – The Department halved the time from application to hire and implemented one-day hiring events where an candidate can complete one-third of the hiring process and receive a conditional offer of employment in one day.
- These efforts are bearing fruit - In calendar year 2019, the Department hired over 600 new employees - 267 of which were correctional officers. In 2019 the Department hired more new Correctional Officers than in 2017 & 2018 combined – the largest number in a single year since 2015.
- **HB 622 will expand the pool of applicants and assist the Department in continuing to increase the number of Correctional Officers it hires without lowering the bar.**

- All Correctional Officer applicants must pass a robust background investigation and a polygraph examination before going through an entry-level academy at the Maryland Police and Correctional Training Commission. After graduating from the Academy, Correctional Officers must undergo 2,000 hours of training in the field and remain on a probationary period for their first year. As such, a new Correctional Officer hire is typically 22 by the time they complete the process. **In altering the age to 19, a new Correctional Officer will be 20 by the time they complete the same process.**
- HB 622 will make the Department more competitive with the counties, the surrounding states, and the Federal Bureau of Prisons.
 - All 24 counties have the ability to hire Correctional Officers at the age of 18.
 - The federal Bureau of Prisons has an entrance hiring age of 20 years of age.
 - As many as 30 states have a Correctional Officer hiring age or waiver ability that allow for prior to the age of 21.
- Research shows that a minimum hiring age of 19 has been particularly beneficial to rural areas of the country. It provides a one-year separation from traditional high school graduation age while creating sustainable employment while pursuing post-secondary education in local community colleges. The shift work associated with a Correctional Officer schedule fits well with family businesses in rural settings
- Research has shown that career mind individuals will make a public safety occupation decision as early as 16 years of age. A number of Vocational Programs in Public Safety are offered beginning in the 11th grade of high school (Washington County Maryland).
- Military Service is a career choice that can occur at 18 years of age with a structured on- boarding similar to that offered in the correctional field.
- **HB 622 will allow the Department to better utilize its Cadet Program.** The Department is seeking to reinvigorate its Cadet Program (starting at age 18). This change in hiring age will allow for a Cadet to Employment pathway that currently takes up to three years to occur much quicker for the individual.
- The Department will continue aggressive multi-dimensional recruiting as demonstrated over the past year. HB 622 adds an additional dimension to our efforts that is based on prevailing trends, and industry research.

CONCLUSION: The Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services respectfully requests the Committee to vote favorably on HB 622.