



## WICOMICO COUNTY, MARYLAND

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS  
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Ruth Colbourne  
Warden

February 25, 2020

To: Judiciary Committee

From: Warden Ruth Colbourne

Subject: OPPOSITION of House Bill 742 – Restrictive Housing – Mental Illness – Assessments  
(Restrictive Housing Reform Act)

The Wicomico County Department of Corrections, like many facilities, uses suicide watch as a method of harm reduction. On intake we screen for past suicide attempts, and if an attempt occurred within the past year, we place the person on suicide watch as a precaution until they are evaluated by our mental health staff. This bill, in its current form, would prohibit that practice.

This bill would also require that the mentally ill who are placed on restrictive housing have a designated area. I understand the spirit of the bill. The reality is that some mentally ill scream, or yell at random intervals. Noise is potent trigger for everyone, but especially the mentally ill. Others housed in the same area could decompensate.

We in Corrections are entrusted with the lives of those in our care. It isn't something we take lightly. We aren't monsters. The discretion we wield over housing is something we need to keep everyone – staff and inmates – safe.

Yours Truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ruth Colbourne".

Ruth Colbourne  
Warden