

Nickole Johnson
Mental Health Coordinator
Wicomico County Detention Center
411 Naylor Mill Rd
Salisbury MD 21801

February 25, 2020

The Honorable Delegate Luke Clippinger
Chair, Judiciary Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
101 House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: *HB 742 Restrictive Housing-Serious Mental Illness- Assessments (Restrictive Housing Reform Act)*
Position: **OPPOSE**

Dear Chair Clippinger and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Nickole Johnson. I am currently employed as a mental health coordinator for the Wicomico County Detention Center. For the last 13 years I have been working in different avenues of mental health as a social worker. The correctional system has now been my home for the last 5 years on and off. Today, I am writing regarding some oppositions regarding HB 742. I have now had time to carefully review the bill and although I feel as though the bill has great intentions I do have some concerns.

The detention center is not limited to mental health individuals therefore although I believe HB 742 has great intentions, my understanding of the limitations of restrictive housing is concerning for correctional staff as well as the patients. I am all for limited restrictive housing if there are other alternatives to keeping patients safe, however as I have worked in the correctional system for a period of time, those options are often time limited. Suicide watches alone are the most difficult individuals to keep safe, again we are not a hospital setting these individuals need supervision that often times only is available in restrictive housing and even then, patients have been known to self-harm. Again, we are not a hospital setting therefore when you speak of individuals with serious mental illness being housed in less restrictive settings it is concerning. Anyone who has worked in the correctional center will tell you that we do our best to accommodate these individuals to be housed in a smaller pod such as the mental health pod we have here at Wicomico County Detention Center, however if you have not worked in mental health you do not understand that sometimes placing these individuals in a less restrictive setting does more harm to them and the other inmates who are incarcerated. I just met with a gentleman today, who is actively paranoid, hearing voices, and sexual preoccupied. This gentleman would not be a candidate for less restrictive housing. My other patient was placed in less restrictive housing but could be heard all night long responding to his voices, which caused other patients to not sleep and threaten this individual's life.

Although, I understand the need for less restrictive housing in a detention center setting I asked that you do some research and actually tour some detention centers and speak with mental health staff before finalizing House Bill 742.

Thanks,

Nickole Johnson