

Hello, my name is Maria Trovato and I am a student at the University of Maryland. I'm here representing the Prison Resistance Project, a student activist organization that advocates for prison abolition and works to combat injustices in the criminal legal system. I'd like to thank Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Chang and all the members of the committee for allowing me the chance to speak today. I'd also like to thank Delegate Ivey for sponsoring this legislation, which will give admissions help and preferential admissions to formerly incarcerated MCE workers and help them get jobs with the university system.

Incarcerated workers of MCE are paid a fraction of the state minimum wage, and the University of Maryland has been one of the primary beneficiaries of their exploited labor. As students, we've known for years that our chairs, desks, and tables are created through prison labor. Yet despite relying on their labor, we do nothing to support these workers. MCE workers usually leave prison with no job prospects, no education, and no savings.

Those released from prison already face discrimination in the work-force, and incarceration makes it difficult for individuals to receive a college education. Many incarcerated people come home to poverty with little opportunities for a stable future. In 2017, only 1 percent of the U.S. prison population had a bachelors or graduate degree. Over half of the people recently returning from prison are unemployed. This majorly contributes to their likelihood of being re-incarcerated. As of 2018, 40% of returning citizens to Maryland are rearrested within 3 years. In 2015, it was reported that 73% of citizens returning to Baltimore City reoffend within 3 years after their release.

We also must remember that over 70% percent of Maryland's prison population is Black, compared to 31% percent of the state. There is no question that our prisons systematically oppress and exploit Black people for their labor, while robbing them of future stability. Through this bill, our University system can allow for formerly incarcerated people to attain some stability once they're released from prison. This will not only contribute to their wellbeing, but the wellbeing of their families and communities. This is the very least that we can do.

And while we strongly support this bill, we want to recognize that there should be programs like this for all incarcerated people, whether or not they have worked for MCE. We also must recognize that this bill primarily benefits those who are released from prison, while little is done for those still incarcerated. If we wish to end our state's and our country's commitment to mass incarceration, we need to recognize the humanity of those within prisons and work to substantially decrease the prison population.

Therefore, we strongly urge you to give a favorable report to this piece of legislation. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Maria Trovato, *Education Committee Chair, Prison Resistance Project*