

NAACP UMCP

Testimony for SB403

Thursday, Feb. 25, 2021

Public Institutions of Higher Education - Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated
Individuals - Academic and Employment Opportunities

POSITION: FAVORABLE

My name is Zahrah Siddiq and I am president of NAACP where we work to inform youth of the problems affecting minorities and to advance the economic, education, social and political status of minorities and their harmonious cooperation with other peoples. I would like to thank Chair Pinsky and all the members of the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee for the opportunity to share our thoughts on this important bill.

I am speaking to you today to express my support for SB403. It is time that we acknowledge the hypocrisy of our system and shed light upon incarcerated people's education and rights. According to the Maryland Correctional Enterprises Annual Report in 2019, incarcerated people's pay ranges from 17 to 36 cents an hour for a four to five day work week. According to the Baltimore Sun report in 2019, the Black Maryland prison population exceeded 70% in 2018, compared to the 31% in the state population. These two facts inevitably prove that the MCE is taking advantage of incarcerated and already marginalized peoples' labor.

I would like to point out that feedback given to students, staff, and elected officials from incarcerated peoples have been positive towards the MCE regarding the opportunity to work certain jobs that give them the ability to pass the time and to earn wages. Due to this fact, I believe it beneficial for us to further aid incarcerated peoples' situation in providing them education and a better opportunity to start their lives after their time has been served. Enacting this bill allows us to follow in the footsteps of other institutions that see this hypocrisy as well, such as Georgetown University, who is giving preferential admission to descendants of slaves who were sold by the university, as well as faculty, staff, and alumni.

In a state where we have the highest rate of Black people incarcerated, systemic inequality needs to be addressed. This bill takes a step towards remedying this issue, which is why I am asking you to vote yes on SB403.

Zahrah Siddiq

President of NAACP UMCP