

JOANNE C. BENSON
Legislative District 24
Prince George's County

Finance Committee

Joint Committees

Children, Youth, and Families

Ending Homelessness

Fair Practices and State Personnel Oversight

Management of Public Funds

Protocol



James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 214
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
301-858-3148 · 410-841-3148
800-492-7122 Ext. 3148
Fax 301-858-3149 · 410-841-3149
Joanne.Benson@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony of Senator Joanne C. Benson

SB322 Health – Health and Wellness Standards – Correctional Facilities and Health Care Facilities

Good afternoon Madam Chair and esteemed members of the Finance Committee. Senate Bill 322 - Health – Health and Wellness Standards – Correctional Facilities and Health Care Facilities requires the Secretary of Health to adopt specified health and wellness standards for all State and local correctional facilities and related institutions, accredited hospitals, nonaccredited hospitals, accredited residential treatment centers, and nonaccredited residential treatment centers for which the Secretary adopts specified regulations.

- Approx. \$136,000 million per year in tax-payer dollars is spent on inmate healthcare for 19,000 inmates (*Corizon Health has a \$680 million contract for 5 yrs.*) or \$7,157 per inmate, which is up \$36 million from 2017.
- Approx. 105,000 prescriptions per month are written for inmate illness
- Approx. 30% of inmate healthcare cost is on chronic degenerative diseases
- Maryland inmates suffer from health disparities at a greater rate than the Maryland general population and 70% of the Maryland inmate population is African American¹
- As of the most recent public report of 2011 – \$3 million was spent on hospitalizations of inmates for heart failure, renal failures, strokes, and acute respiratory failure²

Currently, while correctional facilities do offer lacto/ovo vegetarian options for each meal, they do not include whole meals rich in complex carbohydrates. Research has shown that the consumption of these complex carbohydrates can be instrumental in reducing and reversing chronic diseases that require medications to manage. Heart disease is the number one cause of death for all Maryland Residents, including inmates in correctional facilities, which can be reversed through plant-based nutrition.

In 2019, Maryland entered into a five (5) year \$680 million contract w/ Corizon to provide healthcare in our correctional facilities. The bill includes a reporting requirement to provide oversight and

¹ Maryland Department of Health, Minority Health Disparities October 2019 Report on Inmate Health

² Wexford Health Sources, Inc., Maryland Department of Public Safety and Corrections

Monthly UM Status Report 2011 <http://dpscs.maryland.gov/publicinfo/publications/pdfs/IHS/Medical-Services-Attachment-QA-13.pdf>

transparency, so that any changes in illness or diagnoses of inmates that may result from the implementation of this legislation may be documented.

In conclusion, the goal of this bill is to provide better food choices which will result in healthier inmates and reduce medical cost.

Thus, I respectfully urge the committee for a favorable report on Senate Bill 322.