

GATEKEEPERS

For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to LIFE.
Matthew 7:14

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SB 868- State of Maryland Proposed by Senators Corderman, Edwards, West, and Salling Correctional Services-Inmate Release Testimony of William R. Gaertner

Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Honorable Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

I have outlined below the reasons why SB 868 would benefit individuals being released from a state correctional facility in Washington County, Maryland.

Supporting Positions/ Possible Scenarios

- 1) Returning citizens released to Washington County that are not native to Washington County do not have the proper support system and family that are necessary for a successful reentry.
- 2) There is limited transitional housing available for newly released citizens in Washington County. If newly released citizens are sent to Washington County for example, they would reduce the critical available space that is poised and needed for local residents.
- 3) Some of the citizens who are released to Washington County from another city or county end up in the local Mission or shelters. These community shelters have limited space available. Returning citizens often end up homeless on the streets since the Mission is only a 30-day program.
- 4) Many times, returning citizens have a quasi-home plan set up in Washington County, but they are not from WC. The quasi-home plan involves a person or “relative” who is not conducive to the reentry process. They are not following an outlined and legitimate home plan.

Below are actual examples of individuals that were not set up for success in reentry preparation. This may have been avoided if the individual was transported back to their local county correctional facility, connected with local services/parole and probation, and truly connected to a viable home plan.

Case Examples

- 1) One individual’s home plan was directed to the Mission. He came to us for resources after being released into Washington County. Following the first meeting, the returning citizen departed and never returned. There was no follow through, and he has since terminated contact with us.
- 2) Another individual had an 18-month transition program locally in Hagerstown, which was his home plan. He applied and was accepted while in prison. Upon his release, we picked him up from the gate, and dropped him off at the Mission. It became apparent that he was in no way the kind of person who would follow through with the home plan that was set up prior to release. He was simply using his “home plan” to fulfill his obligations to get released. Since then, we were able to assist his move back to Montgomery County.
- 3) It is extremely common that individuals reach out to Gatekeepers while incarcerated. Returning citizens inquire about possible resources including housing, transportation assistance, other reentry resources. A current example involves an individual who is scheduled for release in October of 2022 and is already

reaching out for assistance but is not from Washington County. We write back and say we are not capable of providing such resources if you are not a local resident.

- 4) Recently, another returning citizen was released in September 2020 from prison and had possessed no documentation. It took him 3 months sitting in one of the local recovery houses in Hagerstown to procure proper identification. He requested funds to pay rent, but the funds are intended for and utilized by Washington County residents only. He had to reach out to family in Harford County to pay his rent.

I respectfully request a favorable report on SB 868. Thank you.

Bill Gaertner

Founder and Executive Director