



Congregation B'nai Abraham

בני אברהם

March 2, 2021

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
The Hon. William Smith, Chair

Dear Senator Smith and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

I am writing in support of SB868 that would require inmates to be released in the jurisdiction where they domiciled prior to their confinement and for probation/supervision to occur in the jurisdiction of the same.

I serve as a full-time rabbi of the only Jewish community in the area and as the immediate past president of a large interfaith coalition, consisting of over 40 faith houses of worship. Our faith community works together beyond the walls of our sanctuaries and with the greater community. It is through this spirit of civic and inter-religious cooperation that I offer my own perspective on this complicated situation.

We all agree on the immorality of carelessly releasing inmates into environments lacking support. At first glance, an approved "home plan" for an inmate addresses this concern. It should provide a safe and familiar atmosphere for a person in transition. But the reality is different than the ideal. Why? Hagerstown is at the front lines of a national crisis of substance abuse where a "home plan" is likely an insufficient support system for certain released inmates. Hagerstown sits at the intersection of I-81 and I-70, described as the Heroin Highway. Dealers from far away pump Fentanyl and Oxycontin through our transportation arteries and into the veins of our people.

Many who are recently released from incarceration already feel the pain of harsh judgment. Someone who turns to drugs does so as a quick fix to void the pain, especially the pain of judgment. Too frequently, the answer is to take drugs that provide a false comfort. As a rather small city, surrounded by a rural area. Hagerstown and Washington County are simply not fiscally or institutionally equipped with sufficient treatment or law enforcement infrastructure to deal with the scope of the problem. Is it just to release those who have struggled with drugs into an area already overwhelmed by a drug crisis? Does the current approach unwittingly privilege drug predators over their prey?

In a multitude of ways, the faith community seeks to help drug victims so that they feel God's love and our love, rather than judgment, shame, and rejection. Those who suffer are as much mental health victims as they are criminal offenders. Are those responsible for developing an overall strategy for re-entry fully considering whether communities like mine have the proportional resources to support and protect those victims of the opioid crises?

Thank you,

Rabbi Ari Plost
Congregation B'nai Abraham