



MARYLAND JUVENILE JUSTICE MONITORING UNIT

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1188: OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL –
CORRECTIONAL OMBUDSMAN

House Judiciary Committee
March 9, 2021

Submitted by Nick Moroney, director, Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit (JJMU)

The Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit (JJMU) supports HB 1188, which will provide independent oversight and monitoring of the adult corrections system and improve safety and services inside Maryland’s prisons.

The JJMU is an independent state agency housed in the Office of the Maryland Attorney General. The mission of the JJMU is to promote the transformation of the juvenile justice system into one that meets the needs of Maryland’s youth, families, and communities. This mission is accomplished by collaborating with all who are involved with the system. Monitors from the Unit perform unannounced visits to Maryland Department of Juvenile Services’ (DJS’) operated facilities in order to guard against abuse of incarcerated young people and ensure that they receive appropriate treatment and services.

The JJMU has been instrumental in driving positive changes in the Maryland juvenile justice system since its formation in the wake of widespread systemic abuse issues. The activities of the independent monitoring agency increase the transparency and accountability of the system and raise awareness of the needs of incarcerated youth in the juvenile justice system. Our public reports can be accessed via the following link:

<https://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/pages/jjm/default.aspx>

Independent monitoring with effective oversight works as an important safeguard against the many kinds of abuses that can occur inside high fences and behind locked doors. Unfortunately, unlike the juvenile justice system, people housed in adult prisons in Maryland have been left without the protections and early interventions that an independent body will bring. The proposed Ombudsman’s office will mitigate against abuse and can also help to address potentially serious shortcomings before they become chronic systemic issues. HB 1188 will bring much needed transparency, accountability, and oversight to Maryland’s prison system to promote the safety, health, mental health and well-being of individuals in state custody and help ensure that prisoners receive adequate rehabilitative services to facilitate successful re-entry. Public reporting requirements within the bill will keep Maryland citizens and criminal justice stakeholders aware of systemic issues and proposed solutions to problems within the correctional system. This

heightened awareness of conditions of confinement is the first step toward introducing constructive prison reform measures which will lead to a more effective system that better equips imprisoned people for life in their communities. Such an outcome will help reduce recidivism, strengthen families and communities and enhance public safety in our state.

For these reasons, the JJMU supports HB 1188 and respectfully urges the committee to give the bill a favorable report.