

## **CITIZEN CONCERNED ABOUT THE CURRENT STATE OF PRISON LABOR**

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### **IN FAVOR OF HB0102**

For the Judiciary Committee hearing on 1/26/2021

My name is Ryan Gunnison, and I have been a proponent of prisoners and their needs for basic rights in the United States. I am an undergraduate student at the University of Maryland Baltimore County and a member of the group Divest MCE, better known as the University System of Maryland Anti-Prison Labor Coalition.

This bill is a major step in the right direction for the protection of incarcerated Americans. In no uncertain terms, the prison industry in Maryland profits from the exploitation of its incarcerated population. This exploitation is especially true for the Black community. Black Americans are disproportionately arrested, tried, and jailed on both a state and national level. Maryland is by far no exception. Compensating prisoners fairly by paying them a wage that is considered fair for the general population is essential to breaking the cycle of debt and poverty that creates the majority of criminals in the first place. The wellbeing of prisoners and those they are financially bound to during and after release depends on the education, income, and career opportunities they have after release. Many of these societal commodities may have been denied to them.

In addition to the severely detrimental and inadequate pay Maryland Correctional Enterprises gives to workers, the net income of these workers is dropped even more by the unfair deductions of essential resources like the food, lodging, and clothing deductions this bill seeks to protect against.

The practice of poor compensation in prisons and the system of racially biased impoverishment that leads to incarceration ruins many lives, and it is considerably unethical of Maryland Correctional Enterprises to propagate this system. Social stability can go hand in hand with moral economics and any industry that requires this exploitation in order to succeed requires investigation and total reconstruction. The changes this bill will make are part of the way out for Maryland residents who are pulled into the prison system, and this prison institution is a very clear example of the ways in which Black and poor Maryland residents are denied opportunity. All humans deserve the opportunity to better themselves and this is one extraordinary way to do so.

Your time and this opportunity are both appreciated.