

Bill No: HB0100

Title: Correctional Services - Inmate Cost-of-Living Report - Maryland Correctional Enterprises Diversity Report

Committee: Judiciary/Judicial Proceedings

Hearing Date: January 18, 2021

Position: SUPPORT

I urge this committee to give HB0100 a favorable report. Our correctional system is one of the most closed systems in our state. HB0100 will shed light on one component of that system that has long gone unexamined – Maryland Correctional Enterprises.

Maryland Correctional Enterprises (MCE) is the largest employer in our correctional system – yet how they operate has not been examined. This legislation will require that an annual report be issued around the practices of MCE – to include the workforce within each institution and collect data that will accurately inform the legislature about how MCE operates.

An additional piece of this legislation requires that this report include information on the cost-of-living expenses incarcerated individuals incur – this includes the cost of telephone and video calls (with family and legal representatives) as well as basic necessities to include feminine hygiene products, toiletries and medications. This legislation also would require that the report include information on the daily wages earned by those incarcerated and employed by MCE.

Wages: As someone who was previously incarcerated and employed by MCE, I was paid \$1.35 an hour (which was the max I could earn in my clerk position). The majority of those in the shop I worked in were paid **90 cents**. MCE has contracts where state agencies must purchase from them at market rates – as a result they are charging market rates for good manufactured by incarcerated labor who earns 90 cents an hour.

Work: Because there is a lack of work that MCE engages in, the opportunity to earn money is severely limited. Without a contract, there is no work – without work, there is no income. Additionally, policy states that if you are assigned to a shop you are only **required to work 1 day a month**.

If you only work for 6 hours a day at 90 cents an hour, and you only get assigned one day a month, your wages for the month would be \$5.40 –

From this you must pay medical co-pays (\$2.00 if you have to see the doctor) – you are responsible for the cost of phone calls, stamps and stationery, laundry detergent, shampoo and soap.

Commissary costs are comparable to what we pay for in stores.

Add COVID and our population is locked down – now there is no MCE – No income, yet the costs of basic necessities still exist.

HB 0100 will put the practices of MCE out for inspection and hopefully will lead to change that is long-overdue.

Respectfully submitted,

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