

MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



HB1188 Support – Favorable Vote

House Judicial Committee

March 9, 21012

Dear Chairman Clippinger and Vice-Chair Atterbeary,

I have worked with the MAJR prison reform organization since its inception 7 years ago. We have received numerous calls for help concerning degrading treatment, unhealthy conditions and other Inhumane issues dealing with our prison environments. All attempts made to address the issues with the Correctional Department were ineffective. We were hoping that the environment would improve with the then recent change to our new Secretary Ron Green. It was so humiliating that soon into the job, he encountered a huge in-house scandal involving employees and the prisons. This was one of 5 major scandals that have occurred over the last 11 years.! **Maryland can do better than this!**

HB1188 replaces the current in-house oversight of the internal operations of the prison system to an **independent mechanism of oversight**. It establishes an independent, impartial, public office , The Office of Correctional Ombuds OCO , which is responsible for promoting positive changes in our correctional environment. It's responsibility is to highlight and report its findings not to be the agency to fix the problems. To effectively accomplish this needed changes the OCO will have as the authority to enter any correctional facility at any time, and talk to anyone as needed. It will identify and publish system issues as well as the

complaints of the incarcerated and their families, along with other necessary requirements as stated in the bill. Eight other states have moved to dealing with this issue in the manor proposed by this bill. I hope you will agree and support HB1188. Respectfully submitted, Karen Clark , MAJR member