



Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

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Testimony in Support of SB 977 - Correctional Services -Step Down Programs – Cause of Action

TO: Senator William C. Smith, Chair and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Karen “Candy” Clark, Lead Advocate, Criminal Justice Reform
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland.

DATE: March 30, 2022

The Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland (UULM-MD) asks for a favorable vote on SB 977 instead of its cross-filed bill, HB 67, which has been amended to remove key portions that would increase out-of-cell time and normalize the offender's conditions of incarceration before release. Being kept in restrictive housing is itself traumatizing and its impact varies on the state and needs of the individual. However, the current practice of releasing individuals directly from being held in restrictive housing to the outside community without any required adjustment counseling is not just bad for the offender, but bad for our community.

This bill requires that a 6 month pre-release plan be formed for each person. After an assessment on the individual's condition and needs, a personal case plan for treatment is put into action to help ensure that the individual is better equipped to make a successful transition into their community. Not only is this a more humane and respectful approach, but without this process the person is more likely to recidivate. Which leads to fewer people needing to resort to crime for their livelihood; making the community safer. Evidence-based data shows a sentence punishment alone does not usually serve to deter further offenses. Data shows that rehabilitation is the best possible treatment to reduce this costly cycle. The data shows that offenders who are left untreated are a higher safety risk to the community.

Required data from the Correctional System indicates that about 280 - 300 people are directly released yearly from restrictive housing in this manner. Evidence-based data from the Vera Institute indicates that about 42% will be recommitted within 3 years and even more will return with each following year. People need to have their psychological issues—and the reason why they engaged in criminal behavior—addressed.

This situation also highlights Maryland's history of disproportionate racial disparities. For instance, while black female prisoners make up approximately 24% of the general prison population, they make up 41% of the restrictive housing population at any one time.

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The average cost for an incarcerated person is about \$40,000 per year. Why keep spending greater amounts of money, only to see an offender recidivate because they don't have the support needed to actually stay out of prison? When we invest money in rehabilitation our recidivism rate and prison costs decline; so let's be smart about crime. This bill is a wise investment for our inmates AND our communities. The Unitarian Universalists urge you to honor the inherent worth and dignity of our returning citizens, reduce crime levels and help make our communities safer.

Please support SB 977.

Respectfully submitted

Karen Clark

UULM-MD Criminal Justice Lead