



*SHINING A LIGHT IN THE DARK CORNERS
OF BALTIMORE CITY'S COURTS*

March 1, 2023

The Honorable Will Smith
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Senate Bill 775 (Courts – Payment for Jury Service) FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Smith and Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee members,

Baltimore Courtwatch (BCW) is a transparency organization that observes public court hearings and educates the public on how our judicial system impacts our fellow Baltimoreans. During the pandemic, we have observed and reported on over 5,000 hearings in the Baltimore City Circuit Court. The judicial system we have witnessed is one that consistently fails to live up to the promise of being impartial and fair. SB775 is an essential step moving towards that promise.

The jury system is alleged to be a process that ensures a jury of peers. Yet, all over this country, jury pools have historically been skewed to exclude marginalized people, particularly Black people, in a shocking number of ways. Maryland is no exception and at BCW we have directly witnessed the harm that occurs in trials where a Black person's life is in the hands of an overwhelming majority white jury. Often this is achieved through indirect, yet still insidious, means. This includes asking low-income Marylanders to choose attending jury duty over their own financial well-being.

Our neighbors living in poverty are dealing with a myriad of problems including housing insecurity, food insecurity, and rising health care costs. A single day missed could be the straw that breaks a family's stability. Even a day's worth of work removed from a paycheck could put a family at risk of eviction. And evictions can throw a family into disarray for months, if not years. Many Marylanders are struggling to literally put food on the table and a day without pay would mean them and their family skipping meals or vital medications. **We cannot continue to ask people to risk their health, their children's meals, or eviction from their home to attend jury duty.** Right now our low-income neighbors, who are disproportionately Black, are faced with that choice.



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In effect, leaving jury pay at \$15 per day eliminates the possibility of truly fair and representative jury pools. All Marylanders deserve a fair hearing before their peers. **We ask that the Judicial Proceedings Committee give SB775 a favorable report.**

For more information about Baltimore Courtwatch or our position, please contact Co-Founder Christopher Comeau at chris@baltimorecourtwatch.org