



## Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services

### Office of the Secretary

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**BILL:** SENATE BILL 212 - CORRECTIONAL OFFICER -  
**EMPLOYMENT - AGE REQUIREMENT**  
**POSITION:** SUPPORT

STATE OF MARYLAND

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**EXPLANATION:** This bill lowers the minimum age (from 21 to 19) that a correctional officer may be hired by the Division of Correction (DOC), the Division of Pretrial Detention and Services (DPDS), or the Patuxent Institution beginning October 1, 2022.

**COMMENTS:** This bill will assist the Department in its efforts to hire and recruit qualified correctional officers, providing them with career and educational opportunities. Not only will this bill increase the Department's ability to capitalize on existing hiring incentives, including hiring bonuses and SmartWork, but it will better align the Department with hiring practices across the State and nation.

- The Department has prioritized recruitment, hiring, and retention of correctional officers.
  - Competitive Salaries – Since July 2018, the starting salary of a correctional officer I has increased by over 20% and is now \$46,039. The Department has also created a new correctional officer II position with a starting salary at \$50,816 for applicants who join with transferrable correctional officer experience.
  - Offering Recruitment Incentives – The Department offers a \$5,000 hiring bonus and an additional \$2,500 regional bonus for certain areas of the State so a new correctional officer can quickly take home over \$53,000.
  - Streamlining the Hiring Process – The Department halved the time from application to hire and implemented one-day hiring events where a candidate can complete one-third of the hiring process and receive a conditional offer of employment in one day.
- These efforts are bearing fruit - In calendar year 2020, the Department hired 491 new Correctional Officers, and in calendar year 2021, the Department hired 463 new correctional officers; however, the applicant pool is becoming significantly smaller.

- The percentage of applicants for correctional officer positions has decreased more than 73% since 2016.

Calendar Year	CO Applicants	COs Hired
2014	11,137	425
2015	9,276	376
2016	9,581	63
2017	5,688	102
2018	4,286	160
2019	4,578	267
2020	3,806	491
2021	2,556	463

- **SB 212 will expand the pool of applicants and assist the Department in continuing to increase the number of Correctional Officers it hires without lowering the bar.**
- All Correctional Officer applicants must pass a robust background investigation and a polygraph examination before going through an entry-level academy at the Maryland Police and Correctional Training Commission. After graduating from the Academy, Correctional Officers must undergo 2,000 hours of training in the field and remain on a probationary period for their first year. As such, a new Correctional Officer hire is typically 22 by the time they complete the process. **In altering the age to 19, a new Correctional Officer will be 20 by the time they complete the same process.**
- SB 212 will make the Department more competitive with the counties, the surrounding states, and the Federal Bureau of Prisons.
  - All 24 counties in Maryland have the ability to hire Correctional Officers at the age of 18.
  - The Federal Bureau of Prisons has an entrance hiring age of 20 years of age.
- A survey through the Correctional Leaders Association and a 2022 review of other state's correctional hiring practices has determined **that 37 states hire correctional officers who are less than 21 years old:**
  - 28 hire at the age of 18;
  - Four (4) states hire at the age of 19; and,
  - Five (5) states hire at the age of 20.

- In Maryland, local correctional facilities are able to hire at age 18. A 2021 survey conducted by the Maryland Correctional Administrators Association of local facilities resulted in 14 of 16 respondents reporting that they hire at age 18.
- Altering the minimum hiring age to 19 will be particularly beneficial to rural areas of Maryland. It provides a one-year separation from traditional high school graduation age, creates sustainable employment, and incorporates post-secondary education with local community colleges. The shift work associated with a Correctional Officer schedule fits well with family businesses in rural settings.
- The Department has been able to offer new correctional officer hires college credits as the result of partnerships with local community colleges. Currently, graduates of the academy earn 18 college credits.
- Military Service is a career choice that can occur at 18 years of age with a structured on-boarding similar to that offered in the correctional field. A high school graduate can commit to the military in his/her senior year and embark on a journey that offers an incentive of continued education. Lowering the correctional officer hiring age to 19 would allow young adults who are considering their options after high school to apply to the Department with the understanding they will also receive academic benefits.
- Corrections and the military are both agencies offering career opportunities for young adults. According to a 2018 Demographics report from the Department of Defense, the majority of military personnel are between 18 – 25 years (40.7%) and 66% of officers possess a high school diploma, GED, or some college. Changing the hiring age to 19 allows the Department to be considered by career-minded individuals who are seeking to work in public service and who want to remain local.
- SB 212 adds an additional dimension to the Department's hiring efforts by increasing the potential pool of candidates and makes the State of Maryland more competitive with its local and national counterparts.

**CONCLUSION:** The Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services respectfully requests the Committee vote **FAVORABLE** on Senate Bill 212.