
Kimberly Haven

February 17, 2022

Chairman Will Smith
Vice Chairman Jeff Waldstreicher
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Senate Bill 512 –
Office of the Attorney General – Correctional Ombudsman
POSITION: FAVORABLE

Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee,

My name is Kimberly Haven, and I am the Legislative Liaison for Interfaith Action for Human Rights and the Executive Director of Forward Justice Maryland. *I offer this testimony in support of SB 512.*

I have testified before this committee and stated that “we can’t fight or address what we can’t see, and we can’t see what they don’t show us.” SB 512 provides a mechanism for the oversight of the Department of Public Safety that is both long overdue and needed.

Currently the Department maintains that they have the policies and procedures in place that purport to address the issues raised by this legislation. The reality it is tantamount to the department policing itself. This provides no transparency and no accountability which only gives tacit permission for the concerns of advocates to continue.

This is good legislation. In the House hearing, the Department offered that they were seeking accreditations for all of their facilities. However, the accreditation process is conducted by and based on policies developed by correctional officials.

Advocates, families, communities, and taxpayers need this impartial body to ensure that our facilities are safe, that they are well managed and that all of its operations are transparent. There currently exists no accountability for the myriad of failed policies that advocates work tirelessly to address – only to be met with a stone wall.

This legislation is long overdue. We have worked for years on various pieces of reform and worked to include reporting requirements. Typically, these are beaten back by the Department. To have an impartial entity both responsible for oversight and empowered with the tools and resources to

investigate will shine a bright light on the conditions and concerns that have only deepened over the years.

One other aspect of the House hearing that I would be remiss if I did not flag was the statement concerning PRISM. This organization is totally funded by the State (again the police policing themselves), they are not responsive to complaints or concerns from those incarcerated in our prisons and are not required to respond to advocates and attorneys. Why would they when the State is their client.

This legislation is good policy. It will move Maryland in the right direction – the direction of transparency and accountability. It will ensure that one of the biggest budgets in our State does not continue to be a black hole that we just keep pouring money into with out a return on our investment.

As I stated in my opening, we can't fight or address what we can't see, and we can't see what they won't show us. SB 512 will bring to light what we must address within our correctional system.

For these reasons and on behalf of Interfaith Action for Human Rights and Forward Justice Maryland, *I urge a favorable report on SB 512.*

Respectfully submitted,

Kimberly Haven
2103 Gough Street
Baltimore, MD 21213
443.987.3959
kimberlyhaven@gmail.com