



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Appropriations Committee

Thursday, March 9, 2023

House Bill 1123 Correctional Services – Maryland Correctional Enterprises – Minimum Wage and Inmate Financial Accounts

Honorable Members of the Committee,

I am here today to ask you to present House Bill 1123 Correctional Services – Maryland Correctional Enterprises – Minimum Wage and Inmate Financial Accounts. Thank you to Vice Chair Chang for sharing information about MCE with me. I look forward to continuing to learn more and being helpful in any way I can.

As we began our session in Annapolis, many of us were assisted by young individuals who were part of a work release program. Despite their diligent efforts and positive attitudes, it was disheartening to learn that these individuals were being compensated at a rate of merely \$3 per day, or \$90 per month, for their hard labor. This constitutes a gross violation of basic human rights and is a stain on our society. It is particularly poignant that this is happening in the House of Delegates, across from the home of the first Black Governor, and in the presence of life-size figures of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman. Colleagues, this is not rhetoric, this is fact. We are all complicit in this toleration of slavery.

Of particular concern is the impact of incarceration on single-parents and their dependents. Baltimore is facing a youth violence crisis. About 1/3 murders this year have been youth under the age of 18. I attribute some of this crisis to over-incarceration and the resulting financial strain on families. Allowing people who are incarcerated to support their children while in custody can greatly improve the stability and well-being of their families and therefore of my communities.

Imagine a parent who is incarcerated, separated from their child, and yet still wants to provide for their family but obviously cannot. Imagine the mother who works multiple jobs and must leave her teens home alone, hoping they stay out of trouble while she struggles to make ends meet. This gap and absence is the very space that negative influence occupies.

House Bill 1123 aims to address this issue by ensuring that the compensation rate for inmate labor in Maryland Correctional Enterprises is not less than the State minimum wage rate. In addition, the bill seeks to create a bank account for individuals who are incarcerated to

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provide for their families and have a cushion when they are released. Currently, individuals are released with nothing more than a plastic bag and a bus ticket. This is a problem that leads to recidivism. One-third of all releases are sent to Baltimore City, a significant portion therein are sent to my district. With this provision, individuals will have the necessary resources to re-enter society and start afresh.

I believe that it is our civil duty to help these individuals but moreso, it is good public policy to ensure parents can support their children and to come home – overwhelmingly to my neighborhoods, set up for success. By ensuring fair compensation we can help to break the cycle of poverty and crime and promote success and stability for all. This is addressing a root cause of violence called abject concentrated and compounded poverty. With this measure we can reduce crime, we can reduce recidivism, we can reduce poverty – especially child poverty – call me corny for being another legislator trying to bring a bill meant to leave no one behind.

Allowing individuals in custody to return to their communities with resources and a solid foundation can greatly improve their chances of success and stability, reducing the likelihood of reoffending. I urge you to support House Bill 1123 as it has the potential to positively impact the lives of many individuals who are incarcerated and their families. This measure is about crime prevention and public safety. This is how we address root causes. This is murder prevention.

For the aforementioned reasons I urge a FAVORABLE report.

Thank you for your consideration.



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Supporting this legislation will:

1. *Provide financial support to families* of incarcerated individuals, particularly when the inmate was the primary breadwinner. By allowing inmates to save a portion of their wages, they can contribute to a financial safety net for their families after their release, reducing the likelihood of poverty and crime in their communities.
2. *Promote equity in the criminal justice system*, especially in cases where inmates are paid wages below the market rate. By allowing inmates to save a portion of their wages, they can accumulate financial resources to support their reentry into society after their release, potentially mitigating the impact of previous economic disadvantage and contributing to a more equitable society.
3. *Increase a sense of purpose and self-worth*, which can improve their mental health and wellbeing. By allowing inmates to save a portion of their wages, they can feel a sense of control over their financial future and contribute to their personal and financial goals, which can further enhance their sense of purpose and motivation to avoid criminal activities.
4. *Decrease recidivism rates*, as it can offer financial stability during incarceration and motivate them to participate in job training and education programs that can facilitate their success upon release. Allowing inmates to save a portion of their wages can further support their reentry into society by providing them with financial resources to secure housing, transportation, and other basic needs, reducing the likelihood of recidivism and promoting public safety.
5. *Decrease poverty among their families and communities*, particularly in areas with high incarceration rates. Allowing inmates to save a portion of their wages can further contribute to poverty reduction and community revitalization, as inmates can use their savings to support small businesses, invest in education, and promote economic development.
6. *Provide job skills and training* that can aid their chances of securing employment after release. Allowing inmates to save a portion of their wages can further support their employment prospects, as they can use their savings to purchase appropriate attire, cover transportation costs, and contribute to any certification or licensing fees required for their desired field.
7. *Increase feelings of value and respect* which can promote positive behavior while incarcerated, creating a safer and more peaceful environment within correctional facilities. Allowing inmates to save a portion of their wages can further promote positive behavior, as it can provide them with a sense of responsibility and financial discipline, enhancing their prospects for a successful reentry into society.
8. *Support their rehabilitation and reentry into society* by providing financial resources to secure housing, food, and other basic needs upon release. Allowing inmates to save a portion of their wages can further support their successful reentry into society, as it can provide them with a financial cushion for unexpected expenses, reduce their reliance on public assistance, and promote their self-sufficiency and independence.