

- Good morning, Chair Jackson and members of the Budget and Taxation Pensions Subcommittee.
- My name is Lena Williams, the mother of Sydney Collins, the widow of Correctional Officer Gregory Collins. Greg was a former Marine, a former Navy Seabee and a member of the Maryland Army National Guard at the time of his death.
- For those who are not familiar with my story, just after midnight on June 4, 2001, my husband left his job as a correctional officer at Eastern Correctional Institution. He never made it home.
- After hours of waiting, I began making phone calls to friends, family, and ultimately the police to report him missing.
- My husband was found murdered, he was shot and killed on his way home, and his killer was not arrested for another 18 years.
- That day has and will forever continue to change my life. As a new mother at 27 years old, I was made a widow. I instantly became a single parent and sole provider to our infant daughter. An unbearable change caused by a horrific act.
- When our daughter, Sydney was old enough to understand our reality, I had to tell her that her father was murdered. There were no answers to bring her closure, to ease the pain, tears, emptiness, and loss she felt. A conversation a mother should

never have to have with her child. A child who could not possibly understand or process why her father was murdered.

- This tragedy will always be with me. My daughter and I have suffered great emotional stress for the past 22 years. We were robbed of our life with Greg.
- It was not until a suspect was identified, arrested, and convicted that anyone understood Greg was killed because he had been a correctional officer and was determined to be an in the line of duty death. A hit had been put out on him by a former inmate and gang member.
- Had this information been available at the time of Greg’s death, I would have been able to apply for the Correctional Officer’s Retirement System Special Death Benefit for individuals who were killed because of their job.
- While no one should have to experience the loss my daughter, our family, Greg’s coworkers, and our friends went through, when such tragedies occur, the availability of the death benefit aids those who have suffered the loss of a loved one.
- I now find myself in a position to support a bill that is intended to aid my family. We unfortunately lost Greg, who died by the hands of another, solely because of the career that he chose.

- In conclusion, I thank you for your time and ask that you provide a FAVORABLE report for Senate Bill 244.