

SB 223 - State Government – State Facilities Changes and Closures – Procedures
Position: Support

My name is Eugenia Stepney, I reside in Calvert County, but I use to work at the **Southern Maryland Pre-Release Unit** located at 14320 Oaks Road Charlotte Hall, Maryland in Charles County. SMPRU had twenty-seven Correctional Officers (3 vacancies), three Dietary Officers (1 vacancy), one Maintenance Officer, two Case Managers (2 vacancies), one Secretary, one Facility Administrator, and one Contract Nurse. The facility housed 180 inmates, but they were at one time looking to increase the capacity to 206. The facility had numerous things to occupy the inmates when they are not working; an outdoor basketball court, softball field, volleyball area, weight area, 1/3 mile walking/ jogging area, and picnic tables for relaxing. The facility also had an indoor gym, chapel, visiting room, recreation room (pool tables, ping-pong table, 2 TVs) and library for inmate use. A part time teacher used to come in 2 to 3 days a week helping inmates with reading, math, etc. for GED certification, but she was lost due to budget cuts.

The State of Maryland Department of Corrections established the facility in 1962 to help the communities of Calvert, Charles, Prince George's (Upper Marlboro), and St. Mary's Counties, by allowing the inmates the opportunity to rehabilitate themselves by giving back to the communities and going on to become productive tax-paying citizens. SMPRU was the **only** state pre-release facility located in the Southern Maryland region. It allowed some of the inmates to work in the communities that they came from, and to be close to their relatives for visitations.

Many of the inmates possessed a wide range of skills such as Mechanic, Electrician, Carpenter, Roofer, Painter, Plumber, Heavy equipment operator, etc. that can be used wherever they work. We had a structured process that we utilize for processing inmates back into the work environment. Stage #1: The inmate must obtain a facility job (Maintenance, Dietary, Sanitation, Clothing Room Clerk, Library Clerk, Barber, Painter, Electrician, Laundry Clerk, etc.) working under the supervision of staff. After 30 to 90 days Stage #2: The inmate would apply for Outside Detail clearance (Road Crew) with Correctional Officer supervision. Stage # 3: Extended Outside Detail clearance is without a Correctional Officer. The facility provided all organizations that operate without a Correctional Officer on site Standing Operating Procedures training (Rules and Guidelines for Inmate Work Details supervised by Non-Correction personnel) for staff/ volunteers annually. Stage # 4: Work Release (regular employment). If the inmate had problems performing his tasks, he would not progress to the next stage.

The facility had five Road Crews, one for each county, except for PG County, which has two crews. Each of the crews work with 4 to 6 inmates 5 days a week under the direction of the **State Highway Administration, with an officer on post**, picking up many types of litter along the main highways, medians, and side roads where allowed. The inmates helped to keep the roads clean, beautifying our counties and our communities. County residents, and out of town guest like to see cleanliness as they visit the area attractions like Solomon Island, Chesapeake Beach,

casinos, parks, fairs, carnivals, etc. Depending on the inmate's offense, he might acquire a job with the site after his release.

The inmates worked with the **Charles County Public Works**, facility trained staff, 5 days a week, and sometimes on the weekend when requested. They had detail inmates that work at their shop, or picking up trash, and large items put out (mattress, appliances, etc.), and dead animals on the roadside (not accessible by road crews), and they have work release inmates. The facility usually had three work release crews, and three detail crews with 2 to 4 inmates per crew. After release, eligible inmates could seek employment.

The 4 to 6 inmates went to the **Maryland Department of Natural Resources Fisheries Service Hatcheries Division at the Piney Point Aquaculture Center in St. Mary's County**, with an officer on post, 3 to 6 days a week, depending on the season, to help with the **Oyster restoration** during late April to November. This involved grounds maintenance, cleaning the large tanks, rebuilding wooden pallets, cutting shell bag material, washing and bagging loose oyster shells, wash and bag aged oyster shells for on-site and associated projects statewide, place filled shell bags on pallets, unload shell bags from culture tanks with attached oyster spat, and lastly in the fall load shell bags in planting boats for placement in the bay. The site supervisor provided instructions, training for tractor, forklift, and other machinery use.

The facility had been involved with inmate labor **planting thousands of trees**, with an officer on post, for the state in several areas around the region.

The facility had inmates working with the **Farming 4 Hunger**, which is a pilot program, operated by facility-trained staff/volunteers, usually 5 to 6 days a week, but sometimes 7 days. The state allowed it to operate out of the normal inmate parameters, but it works for many of the inmates. This program has used anywhere from 6 to 16 inmates depending on the time of year. The inmates plant and harvest various vegetables, conduct grounds maintenance, feed animals as required (chickens, pigs & cows) gather eggs, run the very large green house with **hydroponic** planting system, and they make crafts for various holidays. During down time the site offers various classes (Work Force Development) and skills, taught by professionals, free to the inmates: Dealing with difficult people, anger management, reading, writing, math, computer etiquette, CDL license, carpentry, equipment operation, cooking, etc.). The site can take inmates offsite with the facility's permission to do numerous food drop offs for disadvantaged families. The inmates talk to area school age children during field trips to the location (adolescence and teenagers), with supervision, about jail. The inmates tell the kids what went wrong in their lives, and what caused them to end up incarcerated. This gives our children a first-hand look at prison, and the things that can cause you to end up here. Parents, guardians, and volunteers must sign release forms due to the allowed interactions with the inmates. February 22, 2016, Governor Larry Hogan during his tour with DPSCS officials and staff gave inmate Rico Nelson a grant that lasted for 3 years, making him the first paid employee, once he has completed the release process. On April 4, 2018, Lt. Governor Boyd Rutherford

also conducted a tour of the Farm. When the inmates leave incarceration, the site has helped inmates with job placement, finance, clothing, housing, and put them in touch with mentors as needed.

The **Cheltenham Veteran Cemetery**, facility trained staff, utilized **honorably discharged veteran** inmates from the facility to do various duties: digging of graves, assist with interment, stone placement, grounds keeping, sanitation, etc. The site used 2 to 5 inmates. The site aide's eligible inmates with job placement after release.

The **Charles County Fair Inc.** utilizes the inmates for grounds clean up during weekend events at the fair, with two officers on post. This site uses 10 to 12 inmates.

The facility also had **Work Release** inmates that worked regular jobs at area establishments. (Walls Bakery, McDonald's, St. Mary's Landing, Tommy Trucks, Roofing by George, Southern Wheel & Hubcap, Foxy Fish, Dave's Auto Body, CMB Electric, etc.). If the inmate already had a skill, we had long-standing employers that will hire 1 to 12 inmates, and may keep them after release. We also had employers that were willing to train the inmates especially in the fast-food industry. Most of the time they also would keep the inmate after release.

The Southern Maryland Pre-Release Unit had been open for about 59 years, having its inmates working in the community. We made numerous unannounced checks on the sites to ensure compliance and safety by the inmates, correctional officers, and trained site staff/volunteers. I know in 2017, SMPRU generated over \$155,000.00 just for Outside Details plus the work release. The income fluctuates due to the weather, our staffing, site staffing, etc. Since I was working on other things, I am not sure about what went on the other year. Due to COVID-19, everything shut down not allowing the inmates to work. We continually get calls from our private sector employers, detail sites, and new interested potential employers inquiring about when they can get the inmates. Many of the sites and employers had become accustomed to having inmates working because they work hard, and they can depend on them coming to work.

The staff was dedicated to our jobs, and communities. The officers had one to twenty-six years of state service, with an average of six years employment. Most of the staff lived in the surrounding counties. The officers had an increase of travel time from 1 to 2 hours each way to work, depending on traffic, in Jessup. Since the Unit was completely depopulated June 30, 2021, it has put a burden on inmate relatives who wish to see them, but have no way, or cannot travel the distance of some of the other facilities. The inmates have no state Southern Maryland facility for Pre-release inmates to transfer to for preparedness before they go home back into society. The lack of preparedness can increase criminogenic behavior, and recidivism, which can produce a surge in violence. SMPRU had always had the most work release jobs in the pre-release system. Some of the original Detail sites were given to another Department of Correction facility in Jessup, which is too far to accommodate all of the Southern Maryland area sites, and none of the work release sites serviced by SMPRU. Some of the sites were press

worthy, so they were kept in lieu of their 1-to-2-hour drive from the present facility. The trash along the roadsides has increased. **If the communities had been given the opportunity to vote on the closure of the facility, I'm sure SMPRU would still be open continuing the work in the communities, keep the employers happy, the inmates working, and the inmate's relatives somewhat content.**

Sincerely,

Eugenia Stepney

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