



NATASHA M. DARTIGUE
PUBLIC DEFENDER

KEITH LOTRIDGE
DEPUTY PUBLIC DEFENDER

MELISSA ROTHSTEIN
CHIEF OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

ELIZABETH HILLIARD
ACTING DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

BILL: Senate Bill 0097 - Courts - Jury Service - Disqualification

FROM: Maryland Office of the Public Defender

POSITION: Favorable

The Maryland Office of the Public Defender respectfully requests that the Committee issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 97.

Senate Bill 97 would limit the number of individuals who are currently disenfranchised from serving on a jury in Maryland. Where one third of all Americans have a criminal record, this bill would allow more Marylanders to serve their community through jury service. In particular, this bill would have a significant impact on increasing opportunities for jury representation, whereby Maryland currently leads the nation in incarcerating young Black men – such that Maryland has incarcerated the highest percentage of people who are Black in this country, more than twice the national average. The Justice Policy Institute (JPI) has found more than 70% of all people in Maryland’s prisons, double the national average, and almost 80% of people serving at least 10 [years, are Black](#). These are the highest rates in the country, easily eclipsing the next closest states – Mississippi, South Carolina and Georgia.

The bill changes the current law which has a more expansive view of individuals ineligible for jury service because of criminal convictions. Individuals with criminal contacts are still members of their community and should not be silenced or prevented from one of our country’s most basic civic duty, but also one that individuals with criminal records are directly impacted by and should have a right to participate in after their sentences have been served.

For these reasons, the Maryland Office of the Public Defender urges this Committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 97.

Submitted by: Maryland Office of the Public Defender, Government Relations Division.