



Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services

Office of Government & Legislative Affairs

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BILL: SENATE BILL 701

POSITION: SUPPORT

EXPLANATION: This bill lowers the minimum age that a correctional officer may be hired by the Division of Correction (DOC), the Division of Pretrial Detention and Services (DPDS), or the Patuxent Institution from 21 to 19.

COMMENTS: This bill will assist the Department in its efforts to hire and recruit qualified correctional officers, providing them with career and educational opportunities. Not only will this bill increase the Department's ability to capitalize on existing hiring incentives, including two different hiring bonuses, but it will better align the Department with hiring practices across the State and nation.

The Department operates the Division of Correction (DOC), the Division of Pretrial Detention and Services (DPDS), and the Division of Parole and Probation (DPP).

- DOC operates 13 State correctional facilities housing offenders sentenced to periods of incarceration for 18 months and longer.
- DPDS operates the Baltimore City Pretrial Complex which houses pretrial detainees and incarcerated individuals sentenced to incarceration for periods of 18 months and less.
- DPP supervises parolees, probationers and those on mandatory release from correctional facilities.

- The Department has prioritized recruitment, hiring, and retention of correctional officers.
 - Competitive Salaries – The starting salary of a Correctional Officer I has increased from \$46,039 in July 2021 to \$50,551 as of July 2022. The Department has also created a new Correctional Officer II position with a starting salary at \$53,795 for experienced applicants who have transferrable correctional officer experience.
 - Offering Recruitment Incentives – The Department offers a \$5,000 hiring bonus for all new hires and an additional \$2,500 regional bonus for regions with hard to fill positions, allowing a

new correctional officer to take home over \$57,000 in their first year of employment.

- Streamlining the Hiring Process – The Department implemented one-day hiring events where a candidate can complete one-third of the hiring process and receive a conditional offer of employment in one day. The process has also been further streamlined to decrease the hiring time by almost half for other applications that do not result from the one-day hiring events.
- These efforts are bearing fruit - In calendar year 2020, the Department hired 491 new Correctional Officers, in calendar year 2021, 463 new Correctional Officers were hired and in calendar year 2022, the Department hired 316. However, the applicant pool is beginning to decline.
- **SB 701 will expand the pool of applicants and assist the Department in continuing to increase the number of Correctional Officers it hires without lowering the bar.**
- All Correctional Officer applicants must pass a robust background investigation and a polygraph examination before going through an entry-level academy that has been certified by the Maryland Police and Correctional Training Commission. After graduating from the Academy, Correctional Officers undergo 2,000 hours of training in the field as they remain on a probationary period for their first year. Therefore, a new Correctional Officer hire is typically 22 by the time they complete the process. **In altering the age to 19, a new Correctional Officer will be 20 by the time they complete the same process.**
- SB 701 will make the Department more competitive with the counties, the surrounding states, and the Federal Bureau of Prisons.
 - All 24 counties in Maryland have the ability to hire Correctional Officers at the age of 18.
 - The Federal Bureau of Prisons has an entrance hiring age of 20 years of age.
- A survey through the Correctional Leaders Association and a 2022 review of other state's correctional hiring practices has determined **that 37 states hire correctional officers who are less than 21 years old:**
 - 28 hire at the age of 18;
 - Four (4) states hire at the age of 19; and,
 - Five (5) states hire at the age of 20.

- In Maryland, local correctional facilities are able to hire at age 18. A 2021 survey conducted by the Maryland Correctional Administrators Association of local facilities resulted in 14 of 16 respondents reporting that they hire at age 18.
- Altering the minimum hiring age to 19 will be particularly beneficial to rural areas of Maryland. It provides a one-year separation from traditional high school graduation age, creates sustainable employment, and incorporates post-secondary education with local community colleges. The shift work associated with a Correctional Officer schedule fits well with family businesses in rural settings.
- The Department has been able to offer new correctional officer hires college credits as the result of partnerships with local community colleges. Currently, graduates of the academy earn 18 college credits.
- Military Service is a career choice that can occur at 18 years of age with a structured on-boarding similar to that offered in the correctional field. A high school graduate can commit to the military in his/her senior year and embark on a journey that offers an incentive of continued education. Lowering the correctional officer hiring age to 19 would allow young adults who are considering their options after high school to apply to the Department with the understanding they will also receive academic benefits.
- Corrections and the military are both agencies offering career opportunities for young adults. According to a 2018 Demographics report from the Department of Defense, the majority of military personnel are between 18 – 25 years (40.7%) and 66% of officers possess a high school diploma, GED, or some college. Changing the hiring age to 19 allows the Department to be considered by career-minded individuals who are seeking to work in public service and who want to remain local.
- SB 701 adds an additional dimension to the Department's hiring efforts by increasing the potential pool of candidates and makes the State of Maryland more competitive with its local and national counterparts.

CONCLUSION: The Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services respectfully requests the Committee vote **FAVORABLE** on Senate Bill 701.