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Budget and Taxation Committee
Education, Business and
Administration Subcommittee

Pensions Subcommittee
Chair, Rules Committee

Joint Committees

Audit and Evaluation Committee

Children, Youth, and Families

Ending Homelessness

Fair Practices and
State Personnel Oversight

Joint Committee on Pensions

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony of Senator Joanne C. Benson

SB941: Correctional Services- Inmates- Labor, Job Training, and Educational Courses

Good afternoon Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher and members of The Judicial Proceedings Committee. I am here to present SB941 Correctional Services- Inmates- Labor, Job Training, and Educational Courses

The United States of America has the highest incarceration rate in the world. The jail system currently serves more as a form of punishment for wrongdoing than as a tool for rehabilitation, which has been shown to raise the recidivism rate in America. Recidivism is vastly lower in other countries with the same crime rate as the United States and that is due to their focus on prison reform which encompasses inmate labor wages, job training, educational courses along with many others. The average hourly rate of income for inmates in the United States is fifty-two cents per hour. Picture working for hours in harsh conditions and still not being able to afford the bare minimum essentials such as toothpaste, body wash, lotion and not to mention food. This bill will enforce better working conditions and wages for inmates, higher quality job training, and exceptional educational courses to afford inmates the opportunity to be contributing members of society upon release.

This legislation prohibits the compensation rate for inmate labor in Maryland Correctional Enterprises from being less than the minimum wage under the federal Fair Labor Standards Act. It will require the Division of Correction to offer subject to safety and security concerns, job training, and educational course to all inmates. It is essential that inmates re-enter society with skills, knowledge, and understanding of how our economy functions to be able to contribute and lessen the chances of going back to jail.

Thus, I respectfully urge the committee to issue a favorable report for SB941.