

**SHELLY HETTLEMAN**  
*Legislative District 11*  
Baltimore County

Judicial Proceedings Committee

Joint Committee on Children, Youth,  
and Families

Joint Committee on the Chesapeake  
and Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area



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## *The Senate of Maryland*

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

### TESTIMONY OF SENATOR SHELLY HETTLEMAN SB 87 OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL – CORRECTIONAL OMBUDSMAN

The need for **independent** oversight within Maryland's correctional facilities is long overdue. The current system of oversight and accountability within the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) is insufficient to address the myriad of issues arising behind bars.

Senate Bill 87 establishes the Office of the Ombudsman for correctional facilities in the Office of the Attorney General, to provide public reports and recommendations on the needs and rights of prisoners, their families, and prison volunteers. This position would provide needed independent oversight of the adult corrections system, while improving safety and other conditions inside Maryland's prisons.

The bill establishes procedures and reporting mechanisms for addressing concerns and promoting transparency within Maryland's prisons. The Office of the Ombudsman would be responsible for:

1. Investigating complaints concerning incarcerated persons' health, safety, welfare, and rights
2. Providing pertinent information to prisoners and their families
3. Identifying and publicizing pervasive systemic issues
4. Monitoring DPSCS compliance with relevant statutes and policies

Currently, only written or typed grievance letters are accepted from incarcerated people, who may be delivering complaints to the very officials about whom they're lodging a complaint. Each appeal of the grievance letter must go through multiple levels of review that are costly, cumbersome, and can take years to be addressed. The Maryland Correctional Ombudsman will have the power and authority to go straight to the problem, cut through the bureaucracy and address it immediately. This will save the State and taxpayers thousands of dollars by reducing jail condition-related litigation costs.

By establishing the Office of the Ombudsman in the Attorney General's office, Maryland would join at least 12 other states in practicing good-government, providing an independent Ombudsman to publicly report on and make recommendations to improve our correctional Facilities.

I urge a favorable report on SB 87. Thank you.