**SUPPORT HB 385-restrictive housing/Mandela act**

MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities

TO: Chair Luke and House Judiciary Committee
FROM: Phil Caroom, MAJR Executive Committee
DATE: February 14, 2023

Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR) strongly supports HB 385 seeking to reduce the harms from restrictive housing, with reasonable exceptions, and to require annual reports to show whether progress is being made.

It is well-known that Maryland's use of restrictive housing has been excessive — about twice the national average. If only for financial reasons, this practice should be reduced because restrictive housing is estimated to be three times more costly than ordinary incarceration. But there are other equally well-known negative impacts of restrictive housing beyond its cost. Myriad scientific studies show that solitary confinement causes depression, anxiety, sleeplessness and long lasting trauma. This harm to incarcerated Marylanders' mental health can impede their potential for rehabilitation and for re-integrating themselves into our communities upon release.

HB 385 reasonably would require brief training for correctional officers involved in monitoring restrictive housing units. It also would provide reasonable limits for disciplinary use of restrictive housing, comparable to the brief & escalating sanctions effectively used in Drug Courts and in violations of parole or probation under Maryland's Justice Reinvestment Act. It would ensure protection for prisoners with serious mental illness and for those who are vulnerable due to medical conditions or perceived sexual orientation. But, it also would preserve punitive use for those committing the most serious infractions or crimes behind the walls.

For all these reasons, MAJR strongly urges adoption of HB 385.

*NOTE: This testimony is provided on behalf of the Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform executive committee and not on behalf of the Maryland Judiciary.*