

Written Testimony for Bill HB0064- Correctional Ombudsman

Suggest Amendment to include that this role(s) serves all levels of incarceration-including all Local, County, Federal Correctional Institutions in Maryland regardless of whether or not the primary purpose is Forensic.

Hello, as a mother of a currently incarcerated son, a cousin to another incarcerated man, and an aunt to another incarcerated man in the United States, I am actually quite surprised that there aren't already a spokesperson/people on behalf of incarcerated individuals. I am a newly registered member of MAJR (Maryland Alliance of Justice Reform) and I joined after not understanding how the prison system runs with seemingly low to no oversight to ensure that there are no human right violations or concerns. The lack of oversight became obvious to me when my son became incarcerated over 6 years ago. I had never been previously exposed to the prison system except for hearing about my cousin having been imprisoned in Chicago. I expected that meant that he had little to no access to the outside world, that he had to be among others who had committed similar crimes and, I assumed he was guilty.

But with my son's incarceration, my eyes opened up to a whole new perspective on this system. I call it, the new slavery. I thought slavery in the US ended many years ago. But when you lock people up without fair trials, give them mandatory and excessive imprisonment terms, not abide the regulations/laws instituted to protect incarcerated people within the system, give them poor food, poor places to live and sleep, low access to education, low access to healthcare, little to no pay for work, and impact mostly people of color and/or of low socioeconomic status, I can't think of any other parallel system but slavery. Not saying that consequences are wrong for inappropriate behavior but it's time to re-examine what and where the consequences should be, who should be facing these consequences, when should we accept that the consequences have been fulfilled, and how we can ensure that the system is more fair and more equitable among all Americans. I think it's time to do things in a way that supports the foundation of freedom and pursuit of happiness on which the premise of the United States was born.

An ombudsman would be scratching the surface of what is needed but we need to start somewhere, and we need to start NOW!

As an American Citizen, as a Maryland Resident for all of 61 years of my life, as a Healthcare professional dedicated to serve those in need of all types of Healthcare, as a daughter of a Father who dedicated his life in Maryland by serving the healthcare needs of Maryland residents and in particular those suffering with Mental Illness and of a Mother who was a key figure in Maryland as a Volunteer ensuring that assistance was rendered to those in need in Maryland, as a sister to a brother who also served much of his life providing services to help residents in Maryland with substance use disorders, as a sister to other siblings that have provided much more than I can include on this message, and as a friend to many, many others in Maryland, I pray that you will not only vote to pass this legislative request but insist that your colleagues do the same.

Sincerely,

Diane Phillips LaGuerre, RN