



PAUL DeWOLFE
PUBLIC DEFENDER

KEITH LOTRIDGE

DEPUTY PUBLIC DEFENDER

MELISSA ROTHSTEIN
DIRECTOR OF POLICY AND DEVELOPMENT

KRYSTAL WILLIAMS

DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS DIVISION

ELIZABETH HILLIARD
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS DIVISION

POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

BILL: SB620 — Corr. Svcs.— Resources and Education for All Prisons (REAP) Act

FROM: Maryland Office of the Public Defender

POSITION: Favorable

DATE: 02/28/2024

The Maryland Office of the Public Defender urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 620.

Our experience as advocates for incarcerated clients shows us that many of our clients want to take part in programs generally and educational programs particularly, but that access is a serious impediment. Wait list lines can be months or years long. My clients tell me about these access problems regularly.

Moreover, at hearings on modification motions, parole consideration, and similar matters, judges and commissioners place particular emphasis on programming participation. These expectations simply don't line up with reality. Clients who are stuck on programming waitlists are thus at a significant disadvantage through no fault of their own.

Finally, our experience shows us that incarcerated persons need and deserve support in rejoining our community. Many of our clients serve decades-long sentences and re-enter the life we take for granted to see the world has changed dramatically. Re-entry programming helps people prepare to rejoin a changed community and thrive. Clients regularly tell me about how much they've gained from programs they've been able to participate in.

A stated policy purpose of incarceration is rehabilitation. This bill and the data collection and oversight it would provide for would get Maryland closer to that purpose. For these reasons, the Office of the Public Defender urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 620.

Submitted by: Maryland Office of the Public Defender, Government Relations Division

**Authored by: Elise Desiderio, Assistant Public Defender II, Appellate Division,
elise.desiderio@maryland.gov**