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JANUARY 2024

The Maryland Legislature
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

SB0134/HB0297

To the Maryland Legislature,

It is my heartfelt desire for effective change in the Maryland penal system that I write to you today in support of the Ombudsman Bill that is being submitted for your approval this legislative session. For the past twenty years, I have been employed as a craftsman in the sewing industry with Maryland Correctional Enterprises, Inc. at the Jessup Correctional Institution. Formerly, I worked as a legal research clerk, in the institutional library, assisting inmates with their criminal cases. I was educated at Towson State University and during my incarceration, dating back to 1991, I obtained certification to conduct workshops in conflict resolution. I have facilitated numerous workshops with inmates at Jessup in conjunction with the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) and the Maryland State Department of Education.

Over the course of my 32 years of continuous incarceration, I have only been housed in two institutions - the Maryland State Penitentiary (1992-1996) and Jessup Correctional Institution (formerly known as MHC-X) (1996-present). In this time, I have been a witness to the erosion of the Department of Correction in every facet of its operation and I am here to tell you why, and how to fix it. First of all, three major aspects of the prison - medical services, dietary services, and commissary services - have all been privatized, with little oversight or accountability. Because there is an incentive for these businesses to make a profit, inmates are often denied basic services for which the contracts stipulate. And, it's all interrelated, poor nutrition leads to medical issues. A poor selection of food in commissary leads to medical issues, most notably diabetes. There is not enough mental health services, particularly drug abuse counseling, for the continuous stream of new, and old, inmates. The buildings we are housed in are overgrown with mold in the ceilings (Sick Building Syndrome) for which countless inmates will suffer lung disease for the rest of their lives. All of this with no oversight or accountability. Sure, you can put lipstick on a pig (a freshly mown lawn, new paint on the doors) but if you truly look deeper, you will find all is not well.

Now that I've touched on just a few of the issues that need to be addressed in the Department of Correction, let me tell you the first step in how to fix it . . . if you are so inclined. Oversight and accountability, it's that simple. The Ombudsman Bill is designed to implement these two elements into the system in order for it to operate as mandated by statute. Sure, there are some in a position of authority that will oppose such a measure but I encourage you to ponder as to why. Why would anyone want the Department of Correction to starve its incarcerated members from the basic services the public has paid for out of its taxes? Corruption, a lack of oversight and accountability. It's that simple.

Honesty is the cornerstone of every corrective action known to man. I encourage you to take an honest look at the Division of Correction and realize that only through oversight and accountability can we move forward in a productive manner for all concerned. When you vote YES for the Ombudsman Bill, please know that you are making Maryland a safer place to live for everyone. Thank you for your anticipated support of this measure!

Sincerely yours,


William R. Hinton, II

FOR SUPPORT OF THE CORRECTIONAL OMBUDSMAN BILL

Name : Richard L. McLeod,

1013820/190814

Location: Jessup Correctional Institution, (JCI)

November 8, 2023

TO THE MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY:
Proceedings and Judiciary Committees,

Judicial

IN FAVOR OF THE CORRECTIONAL OMBUDSMAN BILL SB0134/HB0297

Greetings Sir and Ma'am:

I appreciate your time and consideration regarding this most important issue. I have been incarcerated in the State of Maryland for nearly the last thirty-seven years. I have spent the lions share of that time here at Jessup Correctional Institution (JCI) in Jessup, Maryland. Formerly known as the Jessup Annex, it has had a very colorful history. Most of which I'm certain you are not going to be aware of. I hope to be able to shed some light on this while explaining my SUPPORT for the upcoming CORRECTIONAL OMBUDSMAN Bill.

I arrived at JCI, then referred to as the Annex in June of 1993 from Patuxant Institution (also in Jessup) where I had been since 1987. There is and has been a consistent issue with regards to the Administrative Remedy Process. That being the fact, you can NOT rely on any entity or agency to investigate itself. The Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (D.P.S.C.S.) is no different. There has been a long-standing issue of getting proper responses to A.R.P.'s when filed within individual Prisons. There is an unfortunate long history in this State in its Prisons connecting to major disturbances caused by the populations inability to have their issues properly heard and addressed by the Administrations due to the A.R.P. Coordinators having run interference rather than seeking appropriate relief. How does this happen? It begins with inordinate delays that violate procedures, granting extensions to the administration as a rule without necessity that extends beyond procedural time-lines, failure to properly investigate alleged mis-conduct and or allegations. There have been many instances where men have been directly or in-directly threatened as a consequence of filing a remedy not to mention the many instances where men have been subject to retaliatory actions including but not limited to shake-downs, being placed on Administrative Segregation, or even transferred to another Institution all

together. The frustration of living under these types of environments has led to violent out-breaks such as the incident in 1997 that resulted in multiple people including both Staff and Incarcerated Citizens.

Having an out-side source of either over sight or accountability would absolutely change the over-all circumstance earlier referenced here. When it is known and understood that there is no longer a space for arbitrary or capricious responses to properly filed Institutional complaints, there will be an immediate change in the processes as they occur in the prisons.

Where outside complaints are concerned, you will find that more often than not the individual complainant received a more appropriate response to their complaint. Primarily due to the Administration fearing higher authority being made aware of the situation. Outside complaints are usually directed to either a Commissioner or even the Secretary's office. This actually high-lights the point of an outside over-sight having a direct effect on a particular situation.

I Thank-you in advance for your time and patience in this long standing concern and look forward to seeing a positive result in the up-coming Legislative session. I reiterate my support for the upcoming Correctional Ombudsman Bill.

With Respect,



Richard L. McLeod, C.P.R.S.

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