

Thank you Senator Smith for hearing my testimony supporting Senate Bill 0134 The Correctional Ombudsman Bill.

My son has been at the Eastern Correctional Institute for over 7 years now.

He has suffered medical and dental issues that were not addressed within an appropriate time frame. This caused episodes of excruciating pain. I had to call the warden's office and he was seen, yet long-standing dental issues identified two years ago remain.

During the months of April-October the heat in the cells climbs to over 100 degrees - there is no air conditioning in the cells and personal unit fans do not alleviate the torturous heat for up to 24 hours a day.

I've encouraged my state representatives to visit ECI and so far their attempts to schedule visits have been difficult. While I know those visits will happen eventually the frustration underscores the importance of having an Ombudsman with authority to have unannounced access.

Maryland prisons are 3200 staff short according to an AFSCME Council 3 report in Maryland Matters April 2023 yet only 400 vacancies are approved by DPSC. Staff shortages cause some misuse of solitary confinement, lockdown for 23 hours a day in a cell, curtailment of educational, rehab and religious services and unsafe conditions for prisoners and staff.

My son's plight is like that of many others surviving in Maryland prisons - they need a real chance to live out their term and to be whole rather than debilitated when returning to Maryland society.

Thank you Senator Hettleman for sponsoring this important bill on behalf of Maryland citizens.

Yours truly
Michele Kennedy Kouadio
MAJR Behind The Walls