

**TO THE MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS AND JUDICIARY COMMITTEES IN FAVOR –
CORRECTIONAL OMBUDSMAN BILL # 0134 / HB 0297**

SB

WITHOUT OMBUDSMAN, WITHOUT OVERSIGHT AN INSPECTION OF EXPECTATIONS, MCIW WILL CONTINUE TO FOSTER VIOLATIONS OF CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS, ABUSE, RETALIATION, DEFICIENCIES IN PROGRAMMING AND THE MISHANDLING OF CASE FILES AND RELEASES OF INCARCERATED PERSONS (IP). I am a Maryland resident from Prince George's County. Incarcerated at the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women (MCIW) for 14 years December 2023. I back a favorable vote in support of the Ombudsman Bill because MCIW is a "moral hazard". By definition a moral hazard is the lack of incentive to guard against risk where one is protected from its consequences. People believe that prison systems are doing the work of protecting them from criminals and rehabilitating them. This trust gives workers within the system the freedom to perform their duties, responsibilities, and obligations as they see fit.

THE VAC –

The Vocational Activities Coordinator[s] (VAC) position is for a civilian. The reason for this position needing to be filled appropriately is, because when a staff member i.e. officer goes from no position of power to a position of influence, that authority can be abused, it is currently being taken advantage of. Resulting in Incarcerated Individuals (II's) not being able to participate in groups/programs/classes, and retaliation by other staff members because of their comradery. Worst is favoritism and personal inappropriate relationships with specific II's, leaving others not being treated fair, firm and impartial according to COMAR. It also gives those same II's the ability to regulate, having weight themselves through staff over other II's.

REBECCA VOE –

This is an II who has come and gone. Within her short time served here at MCIW, Officer Ngugi ensured that she participated in all programs available to the general population, telling her clerk to put her in all classes. Neglecting II's who were here years before she came and still today are on waiting lists. MCIW needs to fill the VAC position with someone who is able to treat all II impartial and evenhanded. Without an Ombudsman Committee, MCIW is going to continue to fail at providing programming and rehabilitation for II's justly.

THE NEWSLETTER –

Like a newspaper but for the institution, The Pulse was distributed quarterly for II's by II's. I am just one of several II's who have been apart of this informative, encouraging, and sometimes funny material. Cynthia Downs, Lucresha Mints and myself were in the computer lab working on The Pulse, II's Helen Newsome(HN) and her fiancé Brianna Brinkley(BB) were in this location prior to us. They showed instant attitudes because of our presence. Refusing to share space with Cynthia to be able to use the computer where the newsletters information is located. There was an exchange of words, Cynthia spoke with Ngugi, not able to get any assistance from her, she left. One week later, we were told that we were going to be replaced. To date there has not been anyone assigned as editors for The Pulse.

HN and BB have been given access to the computer lab by Ngugi for special projects Sun.-Sat. 2:30-9:00PM. Problem is, when anyone tries to use the computer lab for any other reason ie legal computer lab time, Goucher college, the newsletter we are all hassled, pressured, and bullied to leave. Goucher College time is currently Fri., Sat., and Sun. 5:30-8:30PM. Most recently Goucher College staff had to step in and speak with Ngugi about II's Goucher students being harassed while in the computer lab trying to do assignment during their assigned times as well as having to request that Ngugi not have II's who are practicing a step routine to be in the computer lab during Goucher College computer lab time.

In 2023, MCIW has organized a Family Day and Women's Conference both II HN and BB have been consistently able to volunteer for all programs even those prior to this.

OMBUDSMAN WILL PROVIDE ACCOUNTABILITY ENSURING THAT MCIW DOES NOT CONTINUE TO CULTIVATE INFRINGEMENTS OF CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS, NEGLIGENCE, VENGEANCE, INEQUITIES IN PROGRAMMING AND THE MISMANAGEMENT OF CASE FILES AND RELEASES OF INCARCERATED PERSONS (IP).

VETERANS DAY PROGRAM –

Caroline Scruggs came to MCIW for a program to honor female Veterans. We were told that a Veteran's Program has been operating within the men's facility for years and that this administration would be initiating a program here for Vets by Vets. We were specifically told by Warden Holland and Assistant Warden Parker that we would mimic the men and also be included in the current Vet Dog Program that no Veteran is currently participating in.

In Oct. 2023 Ngugi called me into her office and asked what I wanted to do for Veterans Day for the Vet Program. I told her that there are only 11 of us here and to please call us all to her office to ensure that we could come together to make that decision. She assured me that she would. Nov 2, she called a meeting for all Veterans because one Vet wrote to the Warden, AW, and Chief of Security asking why a special group of II's were practicing for the Veterans Program and we Veterans had not been called to do anything for our program. As a group we all spoke to Ngugi about how inappropriate it was to have steppers to step for Veterans because we are not a sorority, how we felt like she personally made a way to incorporate her favorite group of II's into this program, but most important she did not involve any Veterans in the Veterans Day Program. The Veterans Program, I would like to emphasize is for the Vets by the VETS. The Assistant Warden Parker had to step in and direct Ngugi that the steppers are, not to be a part/in control of the Veterans Program. She also had to correct Ngugi who stated to the Vets that the Vet Dog Program is just a name and has nothing to do with actual Veterans.

MORALE COMMITTEE –

Officer Ngugi is in charge of the Morale Committee on the 7-3PM shift for the staff. This affords her the opportunity to have other staff to retaliate on her behalf. After questioning her special participants in the Veterans Program, I had a situation at my job assignment. I was coming in to work and as an II Shala Dorman who was leaving the Maryland Correctional Enterprises (MCE) shops with a scarf on, I noticed that she was not searched by Officer K. Smith. However, when I entered, she not only pat searched me but she grabbed my head like a basketball. I am Sunni Muslim, I am always covered, I have never had any staff member to grab my head like that. She did not inform me of the fact that she was going to grab my head like that making me jerk away. I questioned why she even did that after letting a non-Muslim walk out with a scarf on as well as two others who were wearing hats without even searching them. When any II leaves MCE shops they are to be searched, she targeted me, she works on Center Hall and is very close to Ngugi.

Responsibilities like fundraisers are assigned to the VAC. I was in Ngugi's officer while she made cups of coffee for staff members charging them a two-dollar fee. When questioned as to why so much, her response was well, it's here and it's cheaper than Star Bucks. She bragged to them that the Secretary Caroline Scruggs liked the coffee that she brought back from Africa. My question is, does Ms Scruggs know that she's selling it to the staff? Probably not.

IMMEDIATE FAMILY MEMBER DEATHS –

In the past, if an II lost a family member there were a few ways in which we were able to mourn: 1. Family record and II review in private setting, 2. View via skype in the visiting room – all done through the Chaplain's Dept. This administration Warden Holland does not allow either anymore. In the month of Oct. HN lost her father. Ngugi made special arrangements for her and her fiancé to go into the visiting room and watch the funeral via skype. There have been several II who have lost their family members and they were not afforded the opportunity to view it in any way. Even if this is on a case-by-case basis, what could possibly be the reasoning for allowing an II who had no loss at all to view a funeral versus the many II's who had a loss and couldn't do it?

ABUSE –

In March, my mother who has mental health issues entered into the visiting room hugged and whispered into the ear of Officer Dunnaway. The officer said yes, took off her belt and handed it to my mom. My proceeded to hit me more than five times very hard across my arm as I sat with both hands on the table. Officer Sander, another officer, Latrona Jackson another II and her children and friend were all present in the visiting room that has cameras. I asked if the visit could be canceled and Dunnaway laughed saying no to me, stating to my mom, and if you need it again just let me know. Who can we turn to?

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