

February 7, 2024

Steven G. Asin
Bethesda, MD 20817

TESTIMONY ON SB0134/HB0297 - POSITION: FAVORABLE
Office of the Attorney General – Correctional Ombudsman Unit

TO: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Steven G. Asin

My name is Steven G. Asin. I am a resident of District 16. I am submitting this testimony in support SB0134/HB0297, Office of the Attorney General – Correctional Ombudsman Unit.

I am a 73-year-old attorney whose career and retirement have been devoted to providing representation to persons charged with or convicted of crimes who cannot afford to retain a lawyer to represent them. My experience has shown me that real and lasting criminal justice reform requires a change in the way criminal legal system actors view the individuals whose fates they determine. They need to see them as more than the worst thing they have ever done, and as fully human as their own sons and daughters, nieces and nephews, and close friends and relatives. If we view the men and women confined in Maryland's prisons in this way, then the existing conditions of their confinement become intolerable, and we are called upon to take reasonable actions to remedy them. The establishment of a Correctional Ombudsman not only holds the promise of redressing immediate unwarranted harms suffered by individuals, but also of becoming a source of unbiased, objective data on the conditions and practices in Maryland correctional institutions that can guide future reforms.

To help inform you regarding the conditions in Maryland's prisons, I have included with this submission correspondence from six Jessup Correctional Institution inmates: Dominic I. King, Steven M. Johnson, Anthony Johnson, Terry L. Carter, Ibrahim (Gerald) Dennis, and Deriation Kent.

- Mr. King has been incarcerated for 25 years. He discusses the use and misuse of illicit prescription drugs being tolerated by correctional officers, officers asleep on duty, roach infestations, the lack of emergency communication systems, delays in responding to medical needs, leaky ceilings and black mold, the need for mental health services, and a lack of communication and cultural competency among correctional and nursing staff.

- Mr. Steven Johnson has been incarcerated for 43 years. He describes mistreatment of visitors, retaliation for reporting abuse, medical complaints, and various other situations that could be addressed by a correctional ombudsman.
- Mr. Anthony Johnson has been incarcerated for 36 years. He describes failures in disciplinary proceedings and related processes.
- Mr. Carter has been incarcerated for 27 years. He urges that he has witnessed persistent and routine issues with mental and physical medical treatment, unsanitary conditions of mold and insect and rodent infestation, failures in addressing drug use by inmates.
- Mr. Dennis reports inadequate medical assistance, issues with segregation practices, and poor maintenance of facilities.
- Mr. Kent has been incarcerated for 30 years. He highlights unlawful inmate deaths that have occurred because of poorly trained and ineffectual staff as well as airborne mold infestations.

I encourage you to read the correspondence from these individuals and **I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB0134/HB0297.**

Dominic I. King
285-879/0905519
Jessup Correctional Inst.
P.O. Box 534
Jessup, MD 20794

November 8, 2023

SB0134/HB0297

To: The Senators and Delegates of the Maryland General Assembly Judicial Committee.

I am a Maryland resident, currently housed at the Jessup Correctional Institute. I received my sentence in June of 1999 for the offence of murder, committed while under the influence of crack-cocaine. I have been housed in JCI for the entirety of my 25 years of incarceration. Since my arrival, I have seen the changes that have taken place here, both good and bad. Despite recent changes for the better, there are still important issues that need to be addressed, changes that probably won't take place unless outside influences have some kind of input. The following issues can be considered threats to health and/or safety of both incarcerated citizens and correctional officers, such as:

1. Drugs

The use of illicit and misuse of prescription drugs is not enforced when it's clear that an inmate is intoxicated, getting intoxicated or overdosed. An illicit substance known as "Squares" (tiny pieces of paper sprayed with chemicals) is smoked 24 hours a day 7 days a week in every housing unit. There are no consequences for getting high in prison. The secondhand smoke from squares smoking causes dizziness light headedness for those of us who don't smoke. The substance emits a strong odor and fumes that cannot be ignored, yet the correctional officers do by escaping to the control center, leaving the rest of us to breath toxic secondhand smoke. Maryland Health General regulations prohibit smoking on state property, but officers not only allow smoking, but also smoke cigarettes out behind the building during lock in hours. Opiate use is also a problem causing many overdoses. When an inmate overdoses he is revived, given water, told to urinate at least twice and sent back to his housing unit where they typically go right back to using and overdosing. No treatment services or accountability are required.

2. Officers asleep on duty

This is a common occurrence at JCI during all shifts, even during mass movements. Some officers have been seen nearly asleep while standing on post in a packed dining hall. This is a real threat to safety for everyone, but there are no reprimands. Someone could get hurt while an officer is asleep on post.

3. Roaches

JCI has a roach infestation problem; the roach poison devices and extermination procedures have been ineffective as they are inadequate and improperly applied. There are cells with individuals who do not clean and possess an extreme amount of personal property that helps the roaches to hid, breed and spread. Complaints are met with only a half hearted effort to fix the problem.

4. Emergency Communication

Cells at JCI are not equipped with emergency communication systems for people who may be having a medical emergency such stroke, heart attack, diabetic emergency, asthma attacks and physical altercations. Several people have died from not being able to communicate with the control center during an emergency. The only ways to alert an officer to an emergency is to kick the door or alert

5. The Medical Department

The JCI medical department consistently fails to respond to sick call request within the 72 hour window of response. JCI residence are more likely to be prescribed a medication than to receive actual treatment, resulting in several sick-call request and months and years of waiting for real treatment. To date, I have been seeking treatment for a hernia for 18 months. Several inmates were miss diagnosed for other illness when in fact they were suffering from cancer only to find out later they were dying. Slow medical treatment is JCI's biggest problem next to drug addiction.

6. Leaky Ceilings and Black Mold

Several teirs have ceilings that leak badly during heavy rains. In between showers black mold has been growing for years. At times the leaks are bad enough for chunks of the ceiling to fall to the floor. Dayroom ceilings are high, so falling debris can be hazardous. Little to no efforts have been made by the maintenance department to make repairs.

7. Mental Health Services

JCI is the institution where the new Peer Specialist Program was started. Inmates are now able to sit with someone to help with addictive, and compulsive behavior; however, as a Specialist and long time resident of JCI, I am aware of cases where more mental health services are required. Most inmates suffering from a disturbance are placed in an isolation cell and monitored by an inmate "Observation Aide." This practice was once done within the general population, until a few men were accidentally released during "mass movement" of a housing unit. In one incident 3 people were attacked when a inmate on observation was accidentally released. I believe more should be done to diagnose, observe and treat mental illness in Maryland prisons.

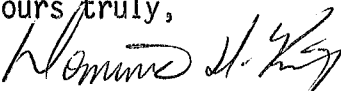
8. Communication & Cultural Competency

JCI's correctional and nursing staff are overwhelmingly native Africans. Because of this, a cultural power dynamic and language barrier exist and is the cause of daily confrontation between officers and the residents of JCI. If it is necessary to staff the institution with predominantly African officers and nursing staff to maintain a disconnect from our communities, these officers should at least be required to take cultural competency training to reduce conflict between staff and inmates.

Since I've never been housed at another institution, I can not tell if these conditions exist elsewhere. But I do know they have been real issues at this institution for several years, if not decades. The drug epidemic and obvious indifference is apparent. I believe independent outside oversight would be effective in keeping those responsible for professional behavior and services accountable for their job performance.

I pray that you will vote in favor of the Maryland Ombudsman Bill this legislative session. Keep in mind, that all of us are just one decision away from living in these conditions; it could be you or one of your loved ones. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours truly,


Dominic I. King, IPS

TO: JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS & JUDICIARY COMMITTEES

RE: CORRECTIONAL OMBUDSMAN

JAN 2024

SB0134/HB0297

Dear Delegate

My name is Steven M. Johnson 155865, I reside at the Jessup Correctional Institution (JCI) in Jessup MD.

I am a Maryland Resident from ST. Mary's County. I have 43 Years in a Life Sentence.

An Ombusman is something is way past needing. In this their is so much Corruption in D.O.C. w/out someone to check on what is going on. By this I mean with no one to look at the facts the Facilities pretty much do what they want in here as far as violating not only our Constitutional Rights but, that of our people.

An oversight is in badly needed. A few Years back at MCI-H my Grandmother was coming to visit me. She had a Pacemaker and she had Documentation from her physician and other documentation that she had a Pacemaker. They made her go through the Metal Detector on Two seperate occassions. Shortly after that incident her Pacemaker Stopped working and had to be rushed to the Hospital and died shortly after that. I feel that she had a new Pacemaker and it would not have stopped if she had not been forced to go through the Metal Detector.

Also recently I was at Roxbury Correctional Institution and a Lt. Rupt spit on me. I reported it and wrote an ARP on it. Captain came and threatened me for writing it. I asked for this Lt.(Rupt) to be tested especially with COVID - 19 going around. Captain Apple threatened to place me on Lock-up. Stating he would stop all my mail to and from the Courts and throw me in Butt Naked Room for Good Measurer. I had written to the MD State Police but all that showed up was Captain Apple with my letter in hand (I think he interceded with my Out Going Mail to MD State Police?).

Thgeir is no one here to intercede on our Behalf on Medical Complaints. It has taken me 2 Years to get Cataract Surgery on my Right Eye and they still have not fixed it properly for the Eye keeps dropping down and shutting. University of MD Hospital said if they had known about this they could have fixed my eye when they did the Cataract Surgery. I told the Eye Doctor about this and even Filed an ARP (Goes unanswered like all ARP'S at this Institution).

I have a AA Degree from Hagerstown JR. College. While I was taking the class the instructor was harassed by Staff because she was teaching a Class. She would tell us how sometimes they would try to Strip Search her as a Deterrent from coming in and teaching us. She would say "I feel safer with you guys than I do with the Correctional

Officers"!

I myself have been in 5 Different Institutions in last Two years. Usually happens when ever I start writing Medical up for refusing to treat me or such as, I've been asking for an MRI for my Torn Left Rotator Cuff (I was diagnosed at Roxbury Correctional Institute after going to Physcial Therapy. I was moved to MCI-H to partisparte in programs and get a job in Maryland Correctional Enterprises. I was their for 6 weeks. I complained about medical was promptly sent out to WCI.

At Western Correctional Institution I was working Ground Maintenance, on the list for Vocational Welding School, and on the MCE Furniture List. I was moved again, for complaining about Medical not giving me my medication and interfering with my Chronic Care visit.

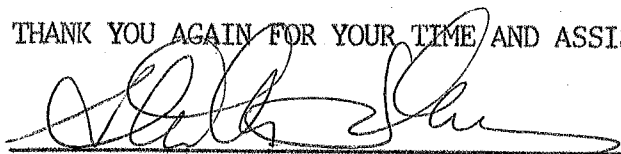
Presently at JCI I am being denied a MCE Job because I moved on the Veteran Tier (No Longer a Veteran Tier) and was promptly given a Sanitation Job was told that as a Honorable Discharged veteran that we had Preferential Treatment as far as Housing and Jobs. I am now being told that no longer exists for Case manager has had my name for 6 months & refused to place me on MCE List due to I have was given a Satiation Job even though the DCD states that F/S does not count toward a Prefered Job. On top of it they work us 7 Days a week but will only pay us for 5 days a week. When I write to Chief of Security she claims No One get's paid more than 5. Though inmates on another Housing Unit do get paid for 7 days a week.

Kefee just raised prices by 10% yet according to the News Inflation only went up 3.7% so why is Kefee Constantly raising Prices and we do not get a increase in pay? Where does the money go to for other than Videos I see nothing else. No new Gym equipment (or even something for us older guys Exercise Bike or Rowing Machine)?

An Ombudsman is in desperate need for their wide-spread - systemic issues.

Closing out I ask for a FAVORABLE - VOTE in SUPPORT of the CORRECTIONAL OMBUDSMAN BILL.

THANK YOU AGAIN FOR YOUR TIME AND ASSISTANCE.



STEVEN M. JOHNSON 155865/219048

P.O.Box 534

Jessup MD 20794

[JESSUP CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION]

FOR SUPPORT OF THE CORRECTIONAL OMBUDSMAN BILL

GUIDANCE FOR WRITTEN TESTIMONY (2024 Legislative Session)

Name: Anthony Johnson, #192-387 SID#996-375 *AK*

Location: P.O. Box 534 (Jessup Correctional Institution)

Date: January 2024

To the Maryland General Assembly Judicial Proceedings and Judiciary Committees

In Favor- Correctional Ombudsman Bill # SB 0134/HB 0297

Hello, I am a Maryland resident and I have been incarcerated for 36 years on a first degree murder conviction. Being incarcerated brings many challenges to my mental and physical health and overall well being. I support a favorable vote on the Ombudsman bill.

Here's why. I was mislabeled a BGF Black Guerrilla Family gang member. I filed with the Inmate Grievance Office, and had a hearing where prison "Intel" prison representatives was allowed over my objection to present documents that I was not allowed to see. These documents were institutional administrative segregation papers that I allegedly signed when they allegedly placed me on admin. segregation for have gang paperwork of some kind. I asked the IGO Judge to allow me to see those admin. seg. papers I allegedly signed because I was never placed on administrative seg. during the course of my entire incarceration. The Judge would not let me see them, allegedly confidentiality and security reason. If I could review those ad-seg documents, I would have been able to clear my name. That IGO process was a sham and I still have this false gang affiliation on my jacket. There clearly has to be some oversight in these processes because this false label has hindered my chances for release and certain institutional jobs.

I strongly believe oversight in this area would prevent others from suffering being wrongfully accused of something that can badly affect your life in prison and in society. I sincerely urge that this bill pass. Thank you.

The Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform
www.maj4.org

11/9/2023

To the Maryland General Assembly Judicial Proceedings and Judiciary Committees

In Favor-Correctional Ombudsman Bill # SB0134/HB0297

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to express my support of the above bill. As a Maryland correctional resident having served nearly 27 years, I have extensive personal experience of the procedures that have governed the internal operation of various correctional facilities and the negative effect they have had on myself as well as the incarcerated community at large.

Having that experience, I believe that independent oversight is long overdue and necessary to maintain a safe and secure environment that is indispensable to preserving the central rehabilitative role of corrections.

A few of the challenges that are persistent to my experience is the routine neglect of mental health and effectual medical treatment, the unsanitary conditions of mold, insect and rodent infestation, and the general incompetence of staff and administration regarding violence reduction and drug use.

Independent oversight in the listed areas is paramount to countering the adverse results of suicides, escalating health conditions, and rampant disregard of institutional welfare by providing a meaningful recourse to existing issues through forced accountability.

As such, and with my support, it is my hope that the upcoming Correctional Ombudsman Bill will pass.

Sincerely,



Terry L. Carter II

#1794751 (278-206)

Jessup Correctional Institution

P.O. Box 534

Jessup, Maryland 20794

Ibrahim (Herald) Dennis #3700635

Jessup Correctional Institution

P.O. Box 534

Jessup MD 20794

SB0134 / HB0297

To: The Maryland General Assembly Judicial Proceedings and
Judiciary Committees

I am writing this letter to show my support for the Ombudsman bill. I am a Maryland Resident and have been for the entire 29 years that I have been living. I support a favorable vote in support of the bill.

When there is no independent oversight over the correctional operations it leaves room for inadequate medical assistance. Likewise, individuals who are on segregation are almost forgotten and don't receive proper attention which splinters the rehabilitation process. Housing Units are left unattended in a proper manner receiving poor maintenance. These are just some problems that arise from having no independent oversight over the correctional operations.

Adopting an independent oversight to the correctional operations process is the solution. Implementing this process will curb many issues and problems by bringing them to the forefront and allowing them to be remedied before growing into widespread systematic issues.

In closing, I again would like to ask for a favorable vote in support of the Correctional Ombudsman Bill. I greatly appreciate your time in reading this

The Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform
www.maj4.org

11/10/2023

To the Maryland General Assembly Judicial Proceedings and Judiciary Committees
IN FAVOR-Correctional Ombudsman Bill # SB0134/HB0297

To Whom It May Concern:

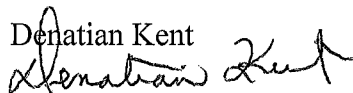
I am currently a Maryland Incarcerated citizen. I have been incarcerated since 1993 and I am in support of the above bill.

Without independent oversight of correctional operations, the State of Maryland is being held liable in lawsuits for unlawful deaths due to ineffectual training of staff that are negligent in their duties. In addition, the airborne mold infestation is an ongoing problem that needs to be addressed.

My experience with the medical department includes witnessing staff stating, "I don't want to touch an inmate" during critical C.P.R. emergencies.

As such, independent oversight will bring to light these errors and produce a permanent state of professionalism.

I ask for a favorable vote in support of the Correctional Ombudsman Bill.

Denatian Kent

#1468008
J.C.I.
P.O. Box 534
Jessup, Maryland 20794