

Testimony for SB 134 Correctional Ombudsman Unit

Hello Chairperson Brian Feldman and Vice Chairperson Cheryl Kagan, Committee members and guests. My name is Sharon Hill. I am here to **support SB 134**. As a 45 year resident of Montgomery County, Maryland, I have been proud to watch our state's efforts to take care of all of its residents. One area in which we desperately need to improve upon is the treatment of our public & private prison population.

The average inmate age of 39 is rapidly skewing upwards. Maryland also holds the unfortunate dishonor of being among the highest prison population with people who were initially sentenced as minors. Of these minors, 80% are Black children.

With severe overcrowding, abuses and mistreatment become more common. Human beings deserve safe, well-run facilities. Children and adults who are incarcerated have already experienced traumas throughout their lives. The current prison environment adds to their trauma.

An independent oversight board in the form of an Ombudsman Unit will, at a minimum, provide a proven mechanism to investigate and publicize individual, as well as systemic abuses which are harming prisoners. Is not our goal to rehabilitate people?

Vote **YES to SB 134**. Thank you.