

Testimony for SB0134 from Bridget Brennan, Carroll County Resident

Senators:

I am writing to urge you to support SB0134 which would establish an Office for a Correctional Ombudsman in the State of Maryland.

Today, incarcerated persons in Maryland face daily acts of violence, unsafe food, lack of medical care or poor medical care, difficulty receiving correspondence, challenges connecting to families and attorneys, and barriers to accessing education or vocational programming. There are facilities with no air-conditioning, leaving incarcerated people and staff suffering 100+ degree heat. Incarcerated people with mental health issues, addiction, and severe health problems are left with poor or no access to needed health care.

"I have seen men die from conditions that were treatable". "Personally, spent weeks with a broken jaw because medical would not send me out for surgery," is one example from one person incarcerated in Maryland for over 30 years who worked in a prison medical unit.

"Since there is no outside accountability of these healthcare providers they do as they wish and we have no recourse to receive adequate care," from another person incarcerated in Maryland.

Reporting misconduct by staff or other incarcerated persons often results in retaliation. The Correctional Administration is often defensive and closed to any outside review. This leaves incarcerated people with little or no way to meet their basic needs and puts them at risk for great harm with no recourse.

A critical goal of incarceration is rehabilitation. 95% of people who are incarcerated in Maryland return to their communities. It is in Maryland's best interest that incarcerated people do

not return to their communities with greater trauma or greater disadvantages due to avoidable mistreatment or poor conditions within prison. Ensuring the safety of people in Maryland prisons—that they have healthy food and living conditions, access to medical care (including proper mental health care), family contact, legal help, and much needed education or vocational training—is just basic human decency. Day-to-day conditions for many incarcerated people in Maryland are inhuman and beyond unacceptable.

A Correctional Ombudsman can be effective in ensuring that there are safe and humane conditions for both incarcerated persons and staff. About 20 other states have established some form of independent monitoring and oversight for their prisons. It is time for Maryland to join these other states and ensure our correctional institutions are environments that allow for incarcerated people to have basic human needs and the resources and support needed to rebuild their lives.

In addition to my testimony, I am submitting the testimony for 6 incarcerated people of over 60+ testimonies provided to the Maryland Alliance of Justice Reform (MAJR) in support of this legislation.

Please vote to approve SB0134 to establish a Correctional Ombudsman's office in the State of Maryland.

Sincerely,

Bridget Brennan, Carroll County citizen, tech worker, volunteer for (MAJR), and aspiring Public Defender.

