
SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 134
Office of the Attorney General - Correctional Ombudsman Unit
Finance Committee
February 8, 2024
FAVORABLE

Good afternoon, Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Judiciary Committee members. I am Derrick Whiting, representing the collective voice of **Social Work Advocates for Social Change**, a passionate graduate student coalition at the University of Maryland School of Social Work. On behalf of our organization, I am writing to express our enthusiastic support for Senate Bill 134.

Senate Bill 134 is a crucial initiative aimed at establishing the Correctional Ombudsman Unit in the Office of the Attorney General. As a returning citizen who has personally experienced incarceration, I believe this legislation represents a critical step forward in addressing the pervasive issues of mistreatment and abuse within the correctional system.

During my time in incarceration, I witnessed and personally endured instances of abuse that went unaddressed due to the lack of effective oversight mechanisms. Senate Bill 134, with its proposal for the Correctional Ombudsman Unit, offers a promising solution to rectify this gap and introduces much-needed accountability, transparency, and justice within the correctional system.

The provisions outlined in the proposed Unit, granting it the authority to investigate administrative acts, conduct independent reviews of correctional facilities, cooperate with agencies to prevent abuses, and maintain a public-accessible website for reports, are pivotal steps in shedding light on potential violations of rights and improving the overall conditions within the correctional system.

I wish to express my particular appreciation for the inclusion of safeguards against reprisals for employees providing information to the Unit. This provision not only fosters a culture of accountability and transparency within the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services but also serves as a protective measure for those courageous individuals who come forward to disclose information about potential abuses.

The establishment of the Correctional Ombudsman Advisory Board, comprising representatives from family members of confined individuals, returning citizens, correctional officers, and individuals with backgrounds in health care and social work, ensures diverse perspectives in identifying matters for investigation.

In conclusion, Senate Bill 134 is a pivotal piece of legislation that holds the promise of significantly contributing to the well-being and rights of individuals confined within the correctional system. I wholeheartedly urge the committee to support and pass this bill, recognizing its paramount importance in creating a fair and just correctional system.

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For more information, please contact

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I respectfully urge the Judiciary Committee to support and pass Senate Bill 134. Thank you for your attention to this matter and for your ongoing commitment to the well-being of Maryland's families.

I urge you to issue a favorable report for SB 134.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change is a coalition of MSW students at the University of Maryland School of Social Work that seeks to promote equity and justice through public policy, and to engage the communities impacted by public policy in the policymaking process.

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