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The Maryland General Assembly
Senate Judicial Committee
100 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland

Re: Correctional Ombuds Bill, SB 0134

Greetings,

I pray that this testimony finds you well. My name is Donald Bovello and I am a former Juvenile Lifer who served over 35 years of a life plus 20 year sentence in Maryland Prisons. During that time I saw and experienced many things which worked well, and many things which did not. Unfortunately, throughout the latter part of my incarceration, I personally witnessed the decline of “corrections” into a place where incarcerated persons experience abuses that were physical, mental, verbal, and some of indifference or pure disdain for persons convicted of crimes. There is a belief amongst some correctional officers that they themselves are the punishment for the inmates, not the actual act of being in prison and the loss of rights and freedom. It is because corrections has gone unchecked that some individuals employed to work in Maryland prisons have devolved into committing acts of evil against other human beings.

“Evil unchecked grows, evil tolerated poisons the whole system.” - Jawaharlal Nehru

Things which occur inside of Maryland prisons which require oversight:

- Verbal and physical abuse of handcuffed inmates (including the mentally ill) by Correctional Officers.
- Verbal abuse and degradation of inmates as a tool of control by Correctional Officers.
- Denial nor delay of basic privileges, rights and services to inmates by Correctional employees as a tool of control.
- Indifference of Correctional employees to unsanitary/unhealthy inmate living conditions.
- Failure of Correctional employees to provide adequate basic necessities for inmate clothing and hygiene.

- Indifference to medical issues experienced by inmates, often dismissed as a minor issue or “attention getting”, to learn later that a serious medical condition existed.
- Housing inmates together who have expressed a need to separate - often leading to fights, stabbings and murder of a cell mate.
- Destruction of inmate property during cell searches.
- Removal of programs and services which contribute to rehabilitation.
- Use of “tier concept” as a broad stroke band-aid to deal with negative inmate behavior versus punishment of those responsible.
- Lack of positive/motivational direction to encourage positive behavior.

Oversight is a threat to what has been the status quo for decades. I personally attempted, via the appropriate correctional employee’s, to solicit legislators to visit the prison to see and experience a workshop with the “Alternatives to Violence Project” (AVP), and for the legal workshop group to discuss the Maryland Legislative process and was told that the prison administration did not want legislators unchecked within the prison as inmates may disclose the issues I have listed above, or for fear that on any given day, when unprepared, legislators may enter a prison to experience the filth and smells that are normal. (Prior to any delegation entering a prison, a massive cleaning and painting effort is undertaken to change the conditions and smells) It is also worthy to note that if any visitors to a prison are taken to speak with inmates, those inmates are “cherry picked” and “encouraged” by correctional officers to “put on a good face”.

Marylanders have the right as taxpayers to know what is going on inside of Maryland prisons, and legislators have the right to know that the laws they have passed are being followed by everyone, including Correctional officers.

It is because of the injustice and illegal acts occurring within Maryland prisons that oversight is necessary.

And I close with this. When correctional employees model integrity, justice, professionalism, compassion, communication, and respect, incarcerated persons have a positive example to follow. This is not a remedy for all of the problems experienced in Maryland prisons, but it is a good start to turning towards a new chapter where Maryland prisons are safer, experience less issues with contraband smuggling, and the recidivism is lowered.

Thank you for your time in reading my testimony in favor of SB 0134 and for your consideration in favor Correctional Ombuds SB 0134.

Respectfully,