



March 5, 2024

Dear Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and Members of the Committee,

Quaker Voice of Maryland is submitting this testimony in FAVOR of HB 297 – *Correctional Ombudsman Unit.*

Quakers believe that all people can change and have historically been active in prison reform work to ensure that our incarcerated populations are provided with the resources they need to reach new potential and return to our communities as successful members. This bill stands out to our members as important legislation because it would support our state correctional institutions in becoming safer and healthier for member of our community who are being held in those institutions.

By creating a independent mechanism of oversight outside of the Maryland correctional system, which would be the Office of Correctional Ombuds, we would be promoting positive change in corrections. This is because the new Office would be responsible for, among other things, investigating complaints related to incarcerated persons' health, safety, welfare, and rights; something that currently is investigated internally by the Department of Corrections which causes conflicts of interest for investigation follow-through.

Quaker Voice of Maryland chose this bill as one of its legislative priorities in 2021, 2022, 2023 and have chosen it again in 2024 because of the positive effect on criminal justice reform this would have on our State. If you are interested in learning more about the issue and how this legislation would lead to positive change in our state institutions I recommend you read the Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform bill information page available on their website (<https://www.ma4jr.org/ombuds/>).

We encourage a FAVORABLE report for this essential legislation.

Sincerely,

Molly Finch

Working Group Member, on behalf of Quaker Voice of Maryland

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