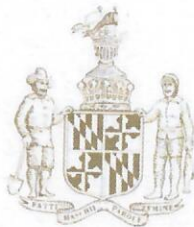


DEBRA M. DAVIS, ESQ.
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Environment and Transportation
Committee



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The Maryland House of Delegates
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 5, 2024

RE: HB297 Office of the Attorney General - Correctional Ombudsman

Chairman Clippinger, Vice-Chair Bartlett and members of the House Judiciary and Health and Government Operations Committees.

I submit this letter in support of HB297 Office of the Attorney General – Correctional Ombudsman. As amended establishes the office of the Correctional Ombudsman as a separate standalone independent unit of the State Government. During my time in the legislature, I regularly receive mail from incarcerated Marylanders and their families citing concerns ranging from access to mental and physical health services, living conditions, safety and allegations of basic civil rights violations.

Recent history has exacerbated the need for oversight. In the midst of the COVID pandemic we struggled to answer family members questions or to get centralized data of whether there were masks, sanitation and appropriate precautions taken to protect the health of incarcerated individuals. In 2022, omb we learned of the horrific conditions of a pregnant inmate giving birth on a dirty jailhouse floor of one of our local jail cells while her cries for help went unanswered . While this bill does not directly address local jails throughout the State it will certainly be a catalyst for establishing a reasonable standard or care.

This legislation would create and empower a Correctional Ombudsman to create oversight for our State prisons. It would authorize unannounced visits and give subpoena power to the Correctional

ombudsman. I submit that is becoming increasingly evident that to omit oversight in light of the millions of dollars in lawsuit settlements is to be fiscally irresponsible.

At present our citizens lack transparency and accountability of what occurs "Behind the Walls" in our State correctional facilities. As policy makers it is incumbent upon us to have access to this information because we can't legislate what we cannot see.

I respectfully request a favorable report on HB297.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Debra Davis", followed by a horizontal line.

Del. Debra Davis, Esq.