

Testimony in support of SB 134: Correctional Ombudsman Unit

April 1, 2024

Dear House Judiciary Committee and Health and Government Operations Committee Members,

I am writing to express my support for the Correctional Ombudsman Bill (SB 134), which passed the Senate unanimously (with changes). As a concerned citizen and someone who worked for the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS), I firmly believe an Ombudsman position within the Maryland State Prison system is a critical step to ensure transparency, accountability, and the humane treatment of individuals and staff as well as staff safety and security.

This position would serve as a vital mechanism for promptly addressing and resolving grievances within the correctional facility. This oversight is essential to safeguard the rights and well-being of incarcerated individuals and foster a system that upholds principles of fairness and justice.

An incident that I can think about occurred early in 2023 when an individual who was incarcerated in the Western Region was the subject of a brutal sexual assault based on the individual being placed in a cell with a known sex offender and one who murdered their child (information from the victim's family). Although investigated as required under the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA), this 25-year-old emerging adult did not receive the services needed to assist with the trauma that ensued during and after the event. Because I was familiar with the system, family members contacted me for help. All I could do was provide them with the right people to contact, but they strongly felt that their loved ones' issues were not being addressed as needed.

The Correctional Ombudsman can act as a bridge between inmates, DPSCS staff, and the broader community, opening communication and understanding. By providing an independent and impartial avenue for addressing concerns, the Ombudsman can contribute significantly to improving prison conditions and the overall effectiveness of the prison system.

I urge you to consider the positive impact the Correctional Ombudsman Bill could have on our community. Your support for this legislation would demonstrate a commitment to justice, fairness, and the protection of fundamental human rights.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter, as this bill has been presented for the past three years. Please consider the Correctional Ombudsman Bill to create a more just and accountable correctional system.

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