



Oral Testimony  
In Favor  
HB – 0297 – Correctional Ombudsman

Submitted by: Madison Gestiehr  
Student Attorney, Decarceration and Re-Entry Clinic  
March 7, 2024

My name is Madison Gestiehr, and I am a student attorney testifying on behalf of the American University Washington College of Law Decarceration and Re-entry Clinic in support of the Correctional Ombudsman Bill. I am also here testifying in support as a lifelong Maryland resident and constitute of District 16.

Over the past few years, especially during my time advocating on the behalf of an incarcerated individuals, I have become increasingly aware of how we treat the incarcerated population in Maryland. And I am not only disgraced by it, but I am also devastated as a Marylander that we haven't done more to prevent the harms that men and women housed, visiting, and working in these facilities face every day. We must do better, and the first step towards doing so is by establishing an Office of Correctional Ombudsman.

As a student attorney in the Clinic, I have had heard directly from incarcerated individuals and returning citizens about their experience in Maryland prisons. For example, I recently read letters from currently incarcerated individuals about their experiences with medical care in their correctional facilities. And, sadly, none of them had anything positive to share.

Among the stories, I read about two men who have gone completely blind because they haven't had their cataracts removed despite pleading with the prison's medical staff for years about their vision loss and need for cataract surgery. Cataract surgery is a simple and very common procedure that people in the free world can access. Denying incarcerated individuals a commonplace procedure that prevents blindness is unjustifiable.

I, also, read a letter from a woman who is a breast cancer survivor who has been complaining of chest pain for months. Despite her pleas, the medical team has denied her a medical examination. However, we all know that cancer can and often does return. This woman lives in fear everyday wondering whether she will die waiting for a proper diagnosis.

These stories are not unique. Every day, incarcerated individuals are denied their basic right to medical treatment. By our complicity we are guilty of allowing this injustice to persist. In my written testimony, I reference an article that raises questions about the current contracted health care provider, Yes Care.

A Correctional Ombudsman will prevent these harms by overseeing the quality of healthcare provided and possibly save lives.

Please vote favorably. Thank you.