



House Bill 597

Growing Apprenticeships and the Public Safety Workforce (GAPS) Act

MACo Position: **SUPPORT WITH
AMENDMENTS**

To: Judiciary Committee

Date: February 6, 2024

From: Sarah Sample and Brianna January

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS HB 597 WITH AMENDMENTS**. This bill seeks to bolster the public safety workforce across Maryland, which is experiencing historic challenges. The bill expands resources for qualifying public safety apprenticeships and invests in support services and workforce enhancements. MACo amendments would include corrections officials in the membership and mission of the proposed effort.

Local emergency services, fire, corrections, and law enforcement officials are the foundation of public safety. Broadening eligibility for funding from the Law Enforcement Cadet Apprenticeship Program to all agents of the public safety ecosystem sends an important message about how much governments and communities value these roles. This is a resource that local law enforcement, detention centers, and fire safety divisions can use to rebuild a qualified and enthusiastic pipeline of new employees.

Other bill provisions include a commission to implement mental health and wellness standards for law enforcement and establish the Workgroup to Grow Engagement in Law Enforcement. Corrections officers have a comparable risk of severe injury, trauma, and long-term adverse health effects. They are suffering the same challenges in terms of staff vacancies, leading to persistent overtime shifts. Corrections officers are not as publicly visible as police officers, who work in the communities, therefore their needs often go unrecognized and overlooked – but their efforts are just as important.

As the rehabilitative arm of the justice system, these professionals look out for and care for some of Maryland's most vulnerable populations, and they need resources and efforts being made to look out for them. County amendments to HB 597, generally, are to include local and state corrections officers among the membership of the commission and the workgroup as well as in the charge of tasks therein. There is a great deal of crossover between the corrections and law enforcement workforces, which is why considering their needs together will make them both stronger independent agencies.

Counties appreciate the effort to consider public safety professions from a more holistic perspective but believe the effort must go further to continue that inclusion for all measures of the bill. For these reasons, MACo urges a report of **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** for HB 597.

AMENDMENTS OFFERED BY MACo

On page 5, after line 2 insert:

“(E) “DETENTION CENTER” MEANS LOCAL OR STATE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY.”

On page 5, amend lines 4 through 9 to read:

(M) (1) THE COMMISSION SHALL DEVELOP MENTAL HEALTH WELLNESS POLICIES TO BE IMPLEMENTED IN LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES AND DETENTION CENTERS IN THE STATE BY:

(I) DETERMINING WAYS TO PROMOTE SAFETY AND WELLNESS AT EVERY LEVEL OF A LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY AND DETENTION CENTER;

(II) INCORPORATING INTO TRAININGS STRESS MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES DESIGNED BY LAW ENFORCEMENT AND CORRECTIONS OFFICERS;

On page 5, amend line 21 and 22 to read:

(a) There is a Workgroup on Growing Engagement in the Law Enforcement and Detention Center Workforce.

On page 6, after line 12 add:

(12) one state member of the Maryland Correctional Administrators Association

(13) one county member of the Maryland Correctional Administrators Association

On page 6, amend lines 23 through 28 to read:

(1) identify and study the shortage of employees in the law enforcement and corrections fields;

(2) determine ways to advertise and promote law enforcement and detention center employment opportunities across the State; and

(3) make recommendations on incentives or other methods to increase the number of employees in the law enforcement and detention center workforce.