

Feb. 29, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Luke Clippinger, Chairman Senator Will Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee and Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee,

This document includes written testimony supporting HB565 and SB0036 from the following thirty-six concerned citizens and organizations:

1. Anita Wiest
2. Armand Davila
3. Bailey Cummings
4. Cassidy Kristal-Cohen
5. Danielle Dupuy
6. Ella Feng
7. Emma Breault
8. Erica Tucker Haygood
9. Erin Cloud
10. Harriet Jacobs
11. Janet Tupper
12. Karen Francisco
13. Karen Smith
14. Micah Clark Moody
15. Micah Levey
16. Peter Santina
17. Shellielle Nanan
18. Taylor Belfield
19. Tom Mathis
20. Van Cherry Green
21. Michael Williams
22. Verlyn Tarlton
23. Teagan Murphy
24. Shalinda Speight
25. Barbara Kazdan
26. Kimberly Jones
27. Fran Nelson
28. Mary Bechle
29. Samantha Heckler
30. LaKeasha Coley
31. Ralph Daniel
32. Shawnde Sousa
33. Melissa Springer
34. Barbara Blackmond
35. 4Him Covenant Church
36. Helen Rodgers

Thank you for your time and effort surrounding this bill. I hope the diverse perspectives and unique stories on the following pages will show you how deeply Maryland residents support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Your Constituents

Feb. 29, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Michael Williams, and I live in Upper Marlboro, Maryland. I am writing as a concerned citizen. I strongly support HB565 and SB0036 because this bill addresses the longstanding and ongoing national crisis of deaths occurring in custody because many of these tragic incidents result from unnecessary use of force and neglect within the criminal legal system. I have worked in the criminal legal system for over 30 years and have seen the devastation caused by negligent law enforcement and corrections “professionals.”

An oversight board investigating deaths in custody is important for protecting the lives and safety of Marylanders because it will help ensure transparency and accountability within Maryland’s custody system. It will also ensure that when an individual dies while in custody, the pertinent details become publicly accessible.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what’s happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Michael Williams

Feb. 29, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Teagan Murphy and I live in Bethesda, Maryland. I am a research assistant at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am writing to support HB565 and SB0036 because an arrest should never equal a death sentence.

I volunteer with Courtwatch PG observing bond hearings that take place in the Prince George's County Upper Marlboro Courthouse. Every day, we witness the callous behavior and arbitrary decision-making of state actors toward our community members, including but not limited to: unaffordable bonds assigned by commissioners and supported by prosecutors; excessive no-bond orders by judges when conditions of release were feasible and appropriate; and— perhaps most egregious— hundreds of community members given the option of "pretrial release," only to be held for weeks or months pending trial as the Office of Pretrial Services fails to process or review their case in a timely manner. These harmful actions, coupled with the fact that a majority of in-custody deaths occur in Maryland while the decedent is awaiting trial, highlight a horrendous yet often overlooked injustice of our criminal legal system— one in which a pretrial hold can effectively become a death sentence.

An oversight board— particularly one that includes formerly incarcerated community members— is a step in the right direction to ensuring that our community members are protected from fatal harm as they are forced to navigate the criminal legal system.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Teagan Murphy

Feb. 29, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Shelinda Speight, and I live in Charles County, Maryland. I am a Maryland resident, devoted mother, daughter, aunt, and a sister of an incarcerated brother who has been serving 29 years for a crime he did not commit. I will fight until the end to ensure he regains his freedom and justice is served.

I am writing to support HB565 and SB0036 100% because I have a brother who is currently in prison. I never want my family and I to experience any type of this nonsense. I became interested and passionate about this issue after hearing horrible stories from my brother while in prison, like how he actually witnessed and saw people die in front of him (not only once, but five times) and also from reading articles about other loved ones dying in prison. This really breaks my heart.

I think an oversight board investigating deaths in custody in Maryland is extremely important because everyone who's involved (inmates, guards, and the warden) should be held accountable if they witness anything that bring danger to the facility.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Shelinda Speight

Feb. 29, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Barbara Kazdan and I am a concerned old lady living in Silver Spring. I am writing to support HB565 and SB0036 because individuals sentenced to prison time ARE NOT SENTENCED TO DEATH!

I'm concerned about better reporting for in-custody deaths on humanitarian grounds. There are many cases of people being wrongfully convicted, and even those guilty of crimes that carry a life sentence are often released on appeal. I'm against the death penalty, and CERTAINLY death by incarceration. An oversight board investigating deaths in custody is an important safeguard for protecting the lives and safety of Marylanders.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Barbara Kazdan

Feb. 29, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Kimberly Jones and I am writing as a concerned citizen. I support HB565 and SB0036 because too many people die in the prison system. I would like to see that the families have closure in these circumstances. An oversight board investigating deaths in custody is important because it is very important to the parties involved in these situations.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Jones

Feb. 29, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Fran Nelson and I am a Court Watch volunteer for the Wisconsin transformational justice nonprofit Esther and Wisdom. I am writing to support HB565 and SB0036 because three deaths have occurred in the Waupun state prison in a few months during the maximum prison lockdowns continuing in Wisconsin. Lockdowns producing more media attention to deaths in custody is what made me into someone who is interested in better reporting for in-custody deaths. An oversight board investigating deaths in custody is important for protecting the lives and safety of Marylanders because every state and federal prison needs oversight.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Fran Nelson

Feb. 29, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Mary Bechle. I am a volunteer for Esther, a social justice organization, and actively involved in courtwatch and criminal justice. I am a former probation/parole agent who literally witnessed how many inmates were treated and prejudiced. An oversight board investigating deaths in custody is important for protecting the lives and safety of Marylanders because there is no transparency in our legal system. It is a system that has been operating with little to no accountability and this needs to end!

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Mary Bechle

Feb. 29, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Samantha Heckler, and I am a concerned citizen. I am writing to support HB565 and SB0036 because too many people die in jail with no state accountability. I have no personal experience, however I feel it's important to have transparency and accountability in this manner. I would never want to see someone I know or a loved one have a situation where they aren't safe and no accountability if something happened. I think an oversight board investigating deaths in custody is important to protect the lives of those serving their sentences in jail and holding someone accountable for anything that happens.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Samantha Heckler

Feb. 29, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is LaKeasha Coley and I live in Fort Washington, Maryland. I am a concerned citizen and formerly incarcerated mother of Prince George's Maryland. I am writing to support HB565 and SB0036 because unfortunately, there are far too many unwarranted deaths in the local jail that have a desideratum for resolution.

I have a loved one who was tragically injured by getting stabbed in the head after a correctional officer opened up his cell for six men to come in. He stated in plain English, "kill him." This officer is still currently employed and working in the same unity with those who were attacked. An oversight board investigating deaths in custody is important for protecting the lives and safety of Marylanders because there is no accountability within the system and the desideratum for oversight is clear and apparent.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

LaKeasha Coley

Feb. 29, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Ralph Daniel and I live in Springdale, Maryland. I am a social activist and I am writing to support HB565 and SB0036 because it's time to shine the light on those deaths of incarcerated individuals. I became interested in better reporting for in-custody deaths by reading numerous stories of the unexplained deaths of men in the NYC prison system. An oversight board investigating deaths in custody is important in Maryland because tis be time to shine the light on these deaths.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Ralph Daniel

Feb. 29, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Shawnde Sousa and I live in Upper Marlboro, Maryland. I am the mother of an incarcerated child. I am writing to support HB565 and SB0036 because my family member is currently incarcerated and has been beaten by officers, and had another inmate not informed me of the incident, I'm scared to think what may have happened to him.

My son has recently had an encounter with officers where he had to be taken to shock trauma for treatment and the facility acted very slowly in getting him the treatment he needed because they were probably trying to cover up the incident. It took them over 5 hours to get him to the hospital and anything could have happened to him in that time. No one should have to suffer that kind of incompetence or negligence.

An oversight board investigating deaths in custody in Maryland is important for protecting the lives and safety of Marylanders because they can be the voice of the voiceless.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Shawnde Sousa

Feb. 29, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Melissa Springer and I'm a concerned citizen and an advocate for returning citizens and incarcerated people, and an advocate for vulnerable children and adults. I'm an advocate for incarcerated people and prison and jail reform is need to help people rehabilitate. An oversight board investigating deaths in custody is important for protecting the lives and safety of Marylanders because people are supposed to be protected while they are in custody. Staff are being paid to protect people in custody. Rehabilitation involves people safety.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Melissa Springer

Feb. 29, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Barbara Blackmond and I am a court watcher with Courtwatch PG. I am writing to support HB565 and SB0036 because every jail and prison should have oversight because too many people die while incarcerated. I have been a courtwatcher for several years in different jurisdictions. Too many people are incarcerated for being poor. There should be NO deaths in jails and prisons. People awaiting trial because they are too poor to afford bail, who have not been convicted of a crime, are exposed to terrible conditions. Some do not receive their medications. This should not be happening anywhere in America.

An oversight board investigating deaths in custody is important for protecting the lives and safety of Marylanders because oversight is necessary for accountability. The existence of an oversight board, in itself, will deter harmful practices.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Barbara Blackmond

Feb. 29, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

4Him Covenant Church of Bowie, Maryland is a nonprofit religious organization writing to support HB565 and SB0036. We support this bill because we believe in the work of Dr. Carmen Johnson and Life After Release concerning the fair treatment of incarcerated members. We had a meeting with Dr. Johnson's organization, which was very eye-opening. We had never heard of the maltreatment of inmates or the plight of formerly incarcerated people. But we believe that the health and well-being of inmates is vital to the community because people are people, and people are worth saving. We believe an impartial oversight board investigating deaths in custody is important for doing the work to protect the lives and safety of Marylanders.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

4Him Covenant Church

Feb. 12, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Armand Davila. I live in Washington, D.C. and I am a concerned citizen and relative of a formerly incarcerated individual. I am writing to support HB565 and SB0036 because my family member was recently incarcerated, and witnessed the most inhumane levels of treatment that robbed people of their dignity and agency, not to mention sometimes their lives. I am interested in better reporting for in-custody deaths because I personally know someone who was incarcerated for a non-violent crime, yet suffered the most heinous physical and mental abuse that anyone could imagine. They have repaid their debt to society but are living with the scars of the abuse leveled upon them. An oversight board investigating deaths in custody is important in Maryland because at the very least, it might discourage the rampant abuse by the penal system.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Luke Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Armand Davila

Feb. 12, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Bailey Cummings. I live in Massachusetts, and I am a concerned citizen and attorney. I support an oversight board to review Maryland in-custody deaths because too many people die in jail with no State accountability.

I am passionate about this issue because as a law student, I had a clinic client die in custody. I have also had a friend's sibling die in custody. Both times, the deaths were not investigated nor reported, and the families were forced to grieve alone with no sense of justice for their loved ones. Institutions responsible for people's lives need to take accountability for their actions.

An oversight board investigating deaths in custody is important for protecting the lives and safety of Marylanders because anyone could end up in custody for all kinds of reasons, whether they do anything illegal or whether they are just suspected of it. Everyone deserves basic care and respect in custody.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Luke Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Bailey Cummings

Feb. 12, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Cassidy Kristal-Cohen. I live in Baltimore, Maryland, zip code 21218. I am also a member of the Maryland Connecting Families Coalition. The loved ones of people who die in custody deserve closure and accountability. I am passionate about the issue of in-custody deaths because I have worked, in professional and personal capacities, with people in prisons and jails since I was fifteen. The rate of deaths, particularly in jails within high poverty and majority Black neighborhoods, is unacceptable and shameful. Maryland must take urgent action to safeguard the lives of people behind bars and the oversight board is a step in the right direction.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Luke Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Cassidy Kristal-Cohen

Feb. 12, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Danielle Dupuy, and I am a Baltimore resident and mother. I am writing to support HB565 and SB0036 because jail time shouldn't be a death sentence and killing people through negligence or otherwise is unacceptable. Accountability is critical for the wellbeing of Baltimore. I am interested in better reporting for in-custody deaths because I care about humanity. An oversight board investigation Maryland in-custody deaths is an important first step towards accountability and to ensuring that the features in place that set the stage for unnecessary loss of life are ended.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Luke Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Danielle Dupuy

Feb. 12, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Ella Feng and I live in Arlington, Virginia. I am a concerned citizen and member of Helping Ourselves to Transform. I am writing to support HB565 and SB0036 because I am dedicated to making Maryland safer for everyone.

As a legal professional deeply invested in public interest and social change, my interest in better reporting for in-custody deaths stems from a profound realization of the systemic injustices prevalent within our criminal justice system. What ignited my passion for this issue was the In Custody Deaths Report for 10 Counties in Maryland Jails/Prisons, which raised significant questions about accountability, transparency, and the need for improved reporting protocols. Witnessing the gaps in reporting and accountability firsthand underscored the urgent need for reform in how we document and address in-custody deaths. Recognizing the profound impact that accurate and transparent reporting can have on shaping policies, driving accountability, and advocating for systemic change, I became committed to advocating for more robust reporting mechanisms and ensuring that the voices of those affected by in-custody deaths are heard and honored within our legal system.

An oversight board investigating deaths in custody is crucial for protecting the lives and safety of Marylanders as it ensures impartial scrutiny, accountability, and transparency in assessing the circumstances surrounding such incidents, ultimately fostering trust in the criminal justice system and safeguarding the rights and well-being of individuals in custody.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Luke Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Ella Feng

Feb. 12, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Emma Breault, and I am a concerned Baltimore City resident. I am writing to support HB565 and SB0036 because too many people die in prison with no State accountability. I am passionate about this issue because I've heard reports on how many people die unnecessarily in prisons and receive no justice. Those who enter the prison system are denied fundamental rights and basic humanity. That the State receives no consequences for preventable deaths of prisoners indicates that prisoners's lives do not matter to the State. It is up to the legislature to hold these systems accountable and ensure that human life is respected—transparency is the first step to this change.

I believe an oversight board is necessary to protect the lives of Marylanders because there needs to be transparency and accountability, and currently there is none. If the people responsible for reporting deaths are the same as those who committed them (or should have prevented them), then fabricated data is more likely. Maryland needs an external reporting committee to prevent bias in this important area.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Luke Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Emma Breault

Feb. 12, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Senator Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Erica Tucker Haygood, and I live in Accokeek, Maryland. I am writing as a concerned citizen. I am writing to support HB565 and SB0036 because I have seen firsthand the reckless disregard for human life that exists within our state's detention centers. I am passionate about this issue because I was arrested for a misdemeanor traffic violation and denied medical care at PG County Jail. An oversight board investigating deaths in custody is important because every human life should be valued and given due care while in custody of detention facility staff.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Luke Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Erica Tucker Haygood

Feb. 12, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Erin Cloud, and I am a Baltimore City Resident. My family member is currently incarcerated, and I am concerned about his safety and the conditions of his confinement. I worry about the safety of my family members every day. The lack of transparency and violence in prisons is outstanding. Every Marylander deserves safety and a chance to live with dignity. Investigating deaths in custody is important to ensure that incarcerated people's lives are not disregarded or abandoned.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Luke Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Erin Cloud

Feb. 12, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Harriet Jacobs, and I am a Baltimore City Resident. I am writing to support HB565 and SB0036 because I am dedicated to making Maryland safer for everyone. The murder of Sandra Bland is what made me into someone who is interested in better reporting for in-custody deaths. I think an oversight board investigating deaths in custody is important for protecting the lives and safety of Marylanders, hopefully, holding prisons and jails accountable, improving conditions for incarcerated people, and reducing the incarceration rates.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Luke Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Harriet Jacobs

Feb. 12, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Janet Tupper. I live in Maryland, and I am a concerned citizen member of CourtWatch Prince George's County. I support an oversight board to review Maryland in-custody deaths because too many people die in jail with no State accountability.

I am passionate about this issue because I am a participant in a community Court Watch organization and listen to bond hearings in the Prince George's County District Court. I have been shocked at the number of people detained while awaiting trial who experience grave, life-threatening illnesses and/or injuries. It is not uncommon to hear of community members in detention who have major medical concerns such as cancer, heart disease, diabetes, high risk pregnancies, or are recovering from gunshot wounds or accidents. Though the jail claims to have medical facilities to treat such community members, it is not an adequate substitute for medical care outside of the correction facility. I believe that community members with grave medical illnesses are at a much higher risk of death while incarcerated.

Accountability is so important for our court system in general, but when community members die in custody with no oversight or public explanation, it is unacceptable. The public has the right to know what happens to community members when they are incarcerated.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Luke Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

JanetTupper

Feb. 12, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Karen Francisco and I am a concerned citizen living in Sacramento, California. I am writing to support HB565 and SB0026 because too many people die in jail in EVERY state with no State accountability. I am interested in better reporting for Maryland in-custody deaths because my daughter is a resident of Maryland. I am aware of several (more than three) in-custody deaths in California, and other deaths in Maryland, New York, Texas, and other states which I have heard reported in alternative news or someone I know was aware of the deaths. An oversight board hopefully will be made up of people who care about humanity and will look closely at these in-custody deaths which is an abnormal event in wholesome society.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Luke Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Karen Francisco

Feb. 12, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Karen Smith. I live in Anne Arundel County. I am the sister of an impacted woman. I support an oversight board to review Maryland in-custody deaths because too many people are dying in jail, and no one is being held accountable for the prison deaths. I am interested in better reporting for in-custody deaths because time after time we are hearing of deaths behind the wall, and no one knows what happened or who did it. An oversight board investigating deaths in custody is important for protecting the lives and safety of Marylanders. A committee should be formed to protect the lives of people behind bars.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Luke Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Karen Smith

Feb. 12, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Micah Clark Moody. I live in Chicago, Illinois. I am a former member of Foundry United Methodist Church in the DMV area have several friends in Maryland. I am writing to support HB565 and SB0036 because too many people die in prison and jail with no accountability.

I am interested in better reporting for in-custody deaths because while working in Los Angeles, I saw an incredible change when the Sheriff started promptly reporting many deaths that occur in the jail. I find it so moving that a group of reporters and activists are able to quickly cover those stories and lift up the lives of people inside as well as the sadness around their deaths. It has also helped local elected officials comment and respond to jail conditions more consistently.

For Maryland, I think it is important for family, community members, and reporters to have rapid access to information on in-custody deaths. Beyond this, it is crucial for an independent board to review these deaths so that they can support law enforcement agencies to ensure the same mistakes are never made again. This will make Maryland safer because people in Maryland include people in Maryland's jails, and an investigating board that can identify and change conditions that cause deaths will literally save future lives.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Luke Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Micah Clark Moody

Feb. 12, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Micah Levey. I live in Gaithersburg, Maryland. I am a concerned citizen, someone who was previously arrested, and an attorney. The State's primary job is to protect its citizens, so we need to know when it is not only failing to do so, but also when it is the State that is causing death.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Luke Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Micah Levey

Feb. 12, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Peter Santina. I live in California, and I am an attorney at Civil Rights Corps in Washington, D.C. and a former public defender. I am writing to support HB565 and SB0036 because far too many people die in jail and urgent intervention is needed.

As a public defender, I've talked to a lot of people who were incarcerated and understand that their life means very little to those who run the jail or prison. If there's an earthquake or fire, no one expects a quick and urgent evacuation. If they have a heart attack or a stroke, no one expects competent and timely medical attention. If they're attacked by a guard—or even another incarcerated person—no one expects the protection of the state. I've sat down with clients and talked about a potential sentence they were preparing themselves for, and we needed to have a very real discussion about the possibility that whatever that sentence is—whether 30 days or 20 years—will only end if they are lucky enough to survive incarceration. While my experience is in California, I think it's a universal experience. At the public defender's office we had clients who died in jail, whose loved ones couldn't say goodbye and were left in the dark about what happened, asking a multitude of unanswered and ignored questions, left only with confusion and pain.

An oversight board investigating deaths in custody is important for protecting the lives and safety of Marylanders because much more supervision and oversight is needed. Jails and prisons have a vested interest in not investigating thoroughly, lest it shed a light on their own shortcomings.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Luke Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Peter Santina

Feb. 12, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Dr. Shellielle S. Youhoing Nanan. I live in Jonesboro, Georgia. I am a Human Rights Defender, International Criminal Investigator and Human Rights Investigator, member of the American Bar Association, International Bar (IBA), International Human Rights Institute, and a member of the United Nations Association of the United States of America (UNA/USA).

Some of my close friends died in police custody and in jail without accountability. The jails are operated with our tax monies, and the government owes those incarcerated a duty to protect. We need strong legislation with teeth to bit. Jails should not get off the hook when they arrest people and cause them to die. I and the United Nations pledge that we will continue to provide whatever support it takes, we will not waver in our fight, and we will win this war.

I am interested in better reporting for in-custody deaths because I have family and close friends in the community who are victims, and we have lost family members and loved ones who died in prison. Those senseless acts are plaguing our nation, especially in the black and brown communities, and there is no transparency. These deaths are being covered up/concealed, and the families are kept in the dark. I am currently a Legal Representative to the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights. My organization investigates in-custody deaths, not only in Georgia but around the country.

My investigations reveal horrific results. I can comment briefly on two cases in Georgia that are the most horrific. One concerns an elderly disabled gentleman (75 years old) who died at the hands of Sheriff's deputies during an illegal eviction after deputies illegally threw him and his wife, who is bedridden, out of their home in 25 degree weather. He suddenly caught a stress attack and was transported to the hospital. The hospital covered up the death in order to protect law enforcement and forged the death certificate, stating that he died from COVID.

The second incident involved a 28 year old man of African American descent, a Type I diabetic who died in custody. After his death the jail and Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) medical examiner covered up the death and said he died from diabetic ketoacidosis (high blood sugar). An 8-month investigation and evaluation conducted by our United Nations Investigative Counsels revealed that he was not only a victim of racial profiling, but that his death was homicide, cruel and inhumane punishment. We found that the victim, who was critically ill, who vomited blood more than 30 times, and urinated blood in continuance, was locked into his jail cell for 18 hours. During those 18 hours he was deprived food, water, and medical care. He also

died of starvation and dehydration. Furthermore, when the body was recovered, it was cold to the touch and stiff. Our United Nations Human Rights forensic team was able to determine a date and time of death, which was omitted from the death certificate, that he died at least 12 hours before the death was reported to the authorities. We continue to fight for the rights of his family and to hold those responsible to account.

It is time that our government pass necessary legislation to hold Sheriffs and jails accountable for the senseless deaths of inmates in their custody. Being arrested should not be a death sentence. An oversight board is important to end corruption, bring about transparency, hold the jails accountable, and save precious lives.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Luke Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Dr. Shellielle S. Youhoing Nanan

Feb. 12, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Anita Wiest. I live in Salisbury, Maryland and I am a concerned citizen and retired Department of Corrections (DOC) employee. I am writing to support HB565 and SB0036 because transparency is a huge issue in the DOC and families have the right to know what circumstances were involved in the death of an incarcerated individual. I am passionate about the issue of in-custody deaths from working in the Division, as well as hearing of deaths that could have been prevented. An oversight board investigating deaths in custody is important for protecting the lives and safety of Marylanders because imprisonment/ confinement in public institutions should be deemed safe in a free society.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Luke Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Anita Wiest

Feb. 12, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Taylor Belfield and I live in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. I am a senior in college currently attending the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and an intern at Helping Ourselves to Transform. I am writing to support HB565 and SB0036 because I believe that anyone who has a caring bone in their body can see that this is an issue that needs to be addressed. As someone who has had brothers and other family members incarcerated before, I couldn't imagine something like that happening to them.

I was first made aware of the issue concerning Maryland in-custody deaths by Dr. Carmen Johnson. Upon reading the reports that she had sent us interns to provide us with more information on the issue, I was astonished to see the reports. The fact that there is a statistic centered around the "misclassification of in custody deaths" is horrifying. No one should be subjugated to this type of reality and we must not turn a blind eye to the issue. Whether we have any prior knowledge of, personal affiliation, or profound passion for justice reform, this is nothing but a simple question of concern and accountability. We live in a country that promises justice to all, so we must all be held accountable for these types of issues. I believe that legislation such as this can help to make that happen.

An oversight board investigating deaths in custody is important for protecting the lives and safety of Marylanders because it pertains directly to them. It is imperative to remember that regardless of a crime that is committed, when in the custody of the state, they are responsible for that person's well-being. It is also important to remember that these are individuals that have not been convicted.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Luke Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Taylor Belfield

Feb. 12, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Tom J. Mathis, and I live in Lanham, Maryland. I am a concerned citizen with many friends who are either still incarcerated or were formerly incarcerated in Maryland. I am writing to support HB565 and SB0036 because I've witnessed through friends who were incarcerated die in jail with no State accountability.

My closest experience is my own cousin who was mistreated in jail for a white collar crime that she still claims her innocence today. She wrote our family many letters about the abuse that was going on while in custody. The stories were horrible and from my own friends experiences who were or are still incarcerated, I knew this should be a fight we should take. We are still humans despite the crimes. I think an oversight board investigating deaths in custody is important for protecting the lives and safety of Marylanders because without it, we have no answers one way or another.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Luke Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Tom J. Mathis

Feb. 12, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Van Cherry Green, and I live in Baltimore City. I am the wife of Mr. Duryea Green, who is being held at the Hagerstown Institution. Mr. Duryea Green has had medical issues since being incarcerated. Thank you to Dr. Carmen Johnson for help getting him out of the institution to get the proper care that was needed regarding his health. My husband was bleeding from the inside that originally came out of the rectum. I knew then it was time to get him to help and care that he needed. I constantly called the infirmary and they were taking their time to get him to care that he needed. By the time that took place, my husband had passed out in the jail. I am also a mother of an incarcerated son and he needed medical attention as well. Thanks to the help of friends that are strong leaders, we helped get him the medical attention that was needed.

After all of these issues regarding medical problems, I later found out that medical institutions Behind the Walls is very important because some of them don't have family to push them to get them the care that they need. I am also informed that the inmates have been taking care of the sickly inmates that are not being treated as such. Medical care is a big issue Behind the Walls. Why do they have an infirmary if they're not doing their job? This bill needs to be passed because it is important regardless of what they are in prison for. Health issues, if known, must be treated. If not, death is behind the issue of the problem.

I am writing to support SB0036 because I am concerned regarding medical issues Behind the Wall. This is a need to be talked about as well as giving needed help for the incarcerated. My husband has been incarcerated for 20 years and has had medical issues since being Behind the Wall. The infirmary at the Hagerstown facility does not care about the loved ones Behind the Wall. I got my husband's health problems treated, with help, but what about the loved ones who does not have family members and no one to fight for them that has medical issues? If an issue needs to be addressed and it's not being taken care of, it gets worse, and sometimes turns into death. Behind the Wall, how do we fix the problem, and get the correct medical teams Behind the Walls? I would love for this bill to be passed, however, it is important to me as well as it should be for higher level leaders of Baltimore City. We need this bill to be passed because we are losing loved ones Behind the Walls because treatment is not being given while they are incarceration.

I am interested in better reporting because of my husband. When he was bleeding in jail in Hagerstown, the jail knew due to me calling constantly to get my husband the care that he needed. It had gotten so worse that the color of his skin was changing due to losing blood. Dr.

Carmen Johnson pushed as hard as she could and got him the medication he was supposed to be on from an outside doctor. When my husband got back to the MCIH infirmary, they changed his medication due to the state saying he could not take it because they were not paying for it so is it not important of his health versus the medication that was to help him? My husband almost lost his life Behind the Wall because he is not getting the care that he needs. He was later taken out to Mercy Hospital in Hagerstown, later finding out that he has cancer, so let's look at the big picture of this. Medical has always been a big issue in the prisons and now I understand the loss of loved ones who has passed on due to negligence of being cared for in medical. How do we fix the issue and the problem? It needs to be a big turn-around with medical with real nurses and real doctors. We have to find a solution other than unlicensed medical teams who don't care and leave our loved ones to die.

An oversight board investigating deaths in custody is important for protecting the lives and safety of Marylanders. We first need to get a better system for medical in the present. Secondly, we need to stop waiting for the issue to get worse to be seen. I am also knowledgeable about the inmates having to put in a ticket waiting to be seen, and infirmary not responding to tickets that they are putting in a box to be seen. The system Behind the Walls needs to be changed as afar as medical. I need the higher ups to look into the issue and the problem. They're still human regardless of what they are in incarceration for. We can't lose loved ones because the lack of medical care. We need to hire to look deep into medical issues besides a Band-Aid and patching up the wound.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Luke Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Van Cherry Green

Feb. 12, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Verlyn Tarlton and I am a concerned U.S. citizen. I am writing to support HB565 and SB0036 because too many people die in prison and I have had family members incarcerated. I am interested in better reporting for in-custody deaths because I have read books about what goes on in prisons and believe accountability is needed. oversight board investigating deaths in custody is important because even those who are in prison deserve fair treatment.

Thank you, Chairman Delegate Luke Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Verlyn Tarlton

Feb. 12, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

Dear Chairman Delegate Clippinger, Senator Smith, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Helen Rodgers, and I live in Odenton, Maryland. I am a mother of four. Three of my children are living, and I lost my oldest daughter in 2007. I am a former detention officer. I am writing to support HB565 because to be treated like a human being is a right everyone should have, whether incarcerated or not.

One specific instance was all it took to make me someone who is passionate about better reporting for in-custody deaths. When I first came on shift one day, I completed my first round where I count and make sure every female inmate is present and accounted for before the officer that I was relieving goes home. Count cleared, female officer went home. Now as for my shift, the only thing that happened was I put a female inmate on 24hr cell restriction for not covering herself up so that the females who were on the bunks in the day room would not see her exposed by looking in through the glass window. Before I put her on cell restriction I had told her twice to cover up and she asked me for a fan, and of course I told her that I could not do that. I did put everything in the computer so that it could be on record.

Now it was my turn to leave, the female officer did her rounds, made sure all female inmates were present and accounted for. I briefed the officer, count cleared, and I went home. When I got back to work, my colonel at the time called me on the phone. She saw where I put the female on 24hr cell restriction, and she asked me why, and I told her. That female inmate passed sometime during that night. I was told that the female officer was not relieved to do no hourly rounds that night. And the sergeant who was on shift that night, not only did he not relieve her, but he got another job working at another correctional facility.

I ended up being subpoenaed to a deposition hearing about the death of the female inmate. When I got to the deposition hearing the lawyer that was handling her case showed me a report that was not mine. My report had been totally changed, and not only that, they had a female inmate to make a false accusation of a statement that I did not even say. The lawyer asked me did I know who changed my report, and I told him I did not. And when he tried to get me to confess to something that I did not have nothing to do with, I said in a very stern voice I WAS NOT THERE. And the lawyer who was representing the detention center that I worked for looked at the schedule and he said “no, you were not there.” Then the other lawyer that was handling the female inmate’s case asked to see the schedule, and he too saw that I was not there, and that’s when the head lawyer got up and left the room, and after a few minutes he came back and he asked me if I would have known that she was suffering from injuries would I have called medical?

Feb. 12, 2024

Maryland House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland
21401
410 – 841 – 3488

And I said: ASAP. So, if it had not been for God and that schedule, I probably would not be typing this testimony to you. Innocent people get blamed for the wrongful actions of officers who need to be held accountable There is too much cover up, and things going unnoticed.

An oversight board investigating deaths in custody is important for protecting the lives and safety of Marylanders because people's lives are important no matter their circumstances. Thank you, Chairman Delegate Luke Clippinger and the Judiciary Committee, Chairman Senator Will Smith and the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Sponsor Delegate Simmons, and Sponsor Senator Benson, for hearing my voice. Too many people are dying in government custody in this state. Worse, Maryland residents know very little about what's happening to their loved ones. This bill will help. I urge you to support HB565 and SB0036.

Sincerely,

Helen Rodgers