

SUPPORT SB 1085 -segregated housing limits

MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



TO: Chair Will Smith and Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Phil Caroom, MAJR Executive Committee

DATE: March 6, 2024

Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR) strongly supports SB 1085 seeking to reduce the harms from restrictive housing, with reasonable exceptions, and to require annual reports to show whether progress is being made.

It is well-known that Maryland's use of restrictive housing has been excessive — about twice the national average. If only for financial reasons, this practice should be reduced because restrictive housing is estimated as three times more costly than ordinary incarceration. But there are other equally well-known negative impacts of restrictive housing beyond its cost. Myriad scientific studies show that solitary confinement causes depression, anxiety, sleeplessness and long lasting trauma. This harm to incarcerated Marylanders' mental health can increase recidivism, impeding their potential for rehabilitation and re-integrating into our communities..

SB 1085 reasonably would require brief training for correctional officers involved in monitoring restrictive housing units. It also would provide reasonable limits for disciplinary use of restrictive housing, comparable to the brief, and escalating sanctions effectively used in Drug Courts and in violations of parole or probation under Maryland's Justice Reinvestment Act. It would ensure protection for prisoners with serious mental illness and for those who are vulnerable due to medical conditions or perceived sexual orientation. But, it also would preserve punitive use for those committing the most serious infractions or crimes behind the walls.

For all these reasons, MAJR strongly urges adoption of SB 1085.

NOTE: This testimony is provided on behalf of the Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform executive committee and not on behalf of the Maryland Judiciary.